

OUR JOURNEY THROUGH REVELATION

A Bible Study

Mike Butler

Southside Baptist Church

Third Edition January 2025

*Unless Otherwise Noted all Scripture References are From the New International Version (NIV)
but will be Updated in Late 2025 to Reflect the New King James Version*

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Introduction:

This is not a commentary. It is simply the notes of a Sunday School teacher who loves the Book of Revelation and wanted to share it with his class.

My notes are simply written. I am not an English major and did not adhere to strict grammatical rules. Instead, I wrote my notes just as they came from my heart and in the vernacular of my southern Virginia / North Carolina influenced speech patterns. There were no editors to help with syntax and punctuation, so I have no doubt you will find errors. These are simply my words, written as I would say them, in an English I understand. So, for those of you looking for a polished and grammatically correct text, I apologize up front. -- This isn't it.

Another thing you'll notice relative to grammatical rules is the fact I never capitalize the names of certain characters - satan, the antichrist, the false-prophet, demons and others. To me, to capitalize a name is to give it prominence and recognition and serves to highlight the name for its importance. I do that with every name of God, even when the text uses words like "Him" or "His", but I never capitalize the names of God's enemies. I realize this is not grammatically correct, but in my own way it puts those names in their proper place.

One other point. This document was written with the Sunday School or Bible Study teacher in mind. That's why it's broken into lessons with each lesson having roughly an hour of content. Since Revelation is so complex most of the lessons start with a "Quick Recap" or "Overview" at the beginning. This will allow a teacher to bring their class up to speed by reviewing highlights from the previous lesson. Hopefully this short review will bring continuity from one lesson to the next, but whether you are a teacher, a student, or a reader, I hope this format helps you learn.

Why Study Revelation?

Several reasons:

First, I firmly believe you have not truly studied God's word unless you've studied Revelation. There are hundreds of verses in both the Old and New Testaments directly related to events described in the Book of Revelation and you cannot fully appreciate any of them until you link them into its overall context. God gave Daniel, Zachariah, Ezekiel and other prophets related visions that when put together provide a clearer understanding of what is meant in Revelation. As you will see in the text, a comprehensive study of the Book of Revelation will take you on a journey through the entire Bible. We go all the way back to Genesis, through most of the prophetic books, the gospels and the epistles to study verse after verse that are related to the end-times. People who have always thought the Old Testament was somehow outdated or meant for some other culture or age quickly come to realize that much of the Old Testament is not only related to the present but is also looking forward to the future. We will see that through our study of Revelation, paying close attention to its Old Testament references that will open up God's word to you like never before. You will find yourself reading passages that once seemed arcane in a completely different light once you make the connection and realize they are part of a much larger story.

Second, the Book of Revelation presents Jesus in a way most Christians have never thought of. Our Americanized view of Jesus is of a Middle Eastern person, with long hair, a white robe and often holding a little lamb. This is a great image and, in many ways, characterizes the Lord in His role as a loving God who came to earth to offer grace to His creation and to give His own life for those who would believe in Him. It is a beautiful picture of our Lord, but it is incomplete. The Book of Revelation shows Jesus in a completely different light. Here He is still seen as the Lamb, but *"...a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain..."* (Revelation 5:6). This is Jesus in His glorified and resurrected state having given His life for the salvation of man. As He accepts the scroll of judgment from the hand of God He is now seen as the Warrior King, the Divine Judge, and The King of kings and Lord of lords. The God who will bring judgment on all unrepentant man, and then on all of creation. This is the Lord with eyes, *"...like blazing fire..."* with feet *"...like bronze glowing in the furnace..."* (Revelation 1:14-15). This is Jesus the Reaper who will, *"Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the world is ripe."* (Revelation 14:15). This is Jesus who, *"...with justice he judges and wages war..."* who *"...is dressed in a robe dipped in blood..."* who will *"...strike down the nations..."* as He *"...treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of the Almighty God."* (Revelation 19:13-15). This is our Lord. Just as He is the loving and gentle Lamb of God who came to save the world, He is also the fierce and vengeful Warrior King who will come to rid His creation of all sources of sin. This is an image of Jesus you find clearly defined in the Book of Revelation. A view of Christ that gives us strength and resolve because we know our Lord and our King is already victorious.

Hallelujah!

Third, I believe we are truly in the end-times. Now, that doesn't mean the Rapture will happen tomorrow (although it certainly could) but it means that many or most of the events on God's pre-Tribulation checklist seem to be in place. Most notably, Israel is back in her land, the fig tree is budding and the nations of the world are turning against her. These are clear indications that events in God's plan for redeeming Jacob (Israel) through the fire are starting to take hold. As Christians we need to understand this. Not because we fear end-times events or some doomsday prophecy, but so we're alert to what God is doing and how His plans are being fulfilled so we're ready when the time comes. In the meantime, we share the gospel with as many as we can until that day. Even if that day is tomorrow or a hundred years from now. Why else would God devote over a third of scripture to prophecy and an entire book to pulling it all together if He didn't want us to understand it? Unfortunately, very few pastors teach Revelation. Either they don't study it enough to teach a basic understanding, or they don't see its relevance to the modern church. But once you delve deep into Revelation you quickly begin to understand just how relevant it is and how we as Christians must understand what God is teaching us through it.

Fourth, Revelation is the only book in the Bible that God promises a blessing if we study it. The Lord's intent is crystal clear in the very beginning of the book, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is in it, because the time is near." (Revelation 1:3). After reading that, how could anyone not want to spend their lives in the study of Revelation? Here God clearly promises multiple blessings from its study. As we "...read aloud the words...", as we "...hear it..." [Hearing through teaching] and as we "...take to heart what is in it..." [From the head to the heart] we will be blessed. How could we hear that blessing and not read it, and not teach it and preach it, so that everyone can hear it, and take it to heart for God's wonderful blessing? It is often said that the greatest deficiency in the modern church today is biblical illiteracy. Sadly, only a small portion of Christians ever read the word at all and even fewer study it. And of those who study it, even a smaller percentage study Revelation. What a tragedy; that we would be satisfied learning only what is taught in Sunday Schools or the pulpit and not crave and thirst for the total word of God. Particularly, when God tells us He will bless us when we study this specific book. Hopefully by the time you finish reading these notes you will understand the urgency we as a church have in delving deep into God's future plans.

How I Studied Revelation:

My Mother, Dorothy Butler, (1924-2019), who was an amazingly faithful child of God and a lifelong student of His word, taught me how to study the Bible. My Mom taught Sunday School for many years and would study the word every night. Next to her chair were stacks of books, commentaries and volumes of her notes. I now own many of her Bibles, from the first one she had when she was 16 years old in the mountains of North Carolina, to the last Bible she owned at 94. And they all have one thing in common - they are completely worn out. Some are held together with tape, some are missing pages, and most of the pages are torn and tattered from being turned hundreds of times. Many of them are a treasure of Biblical scholarship with every blank spot, side margin and end-papers filled with notes and verses. Notes that show the depth to which she would study, but more importantly, notes reflecting the true focus of her Bible study. Two themes emerge as you begin to walk through the verses she cited in the end-papers and her notes in the margins: The complete and powerful sovereignty of an Almighty and All-Powerful God, and the urgency of spreading the gospel of Christ to the world. --- Thanks Mom.

I yearn for the day when we can sit together by the River of Life and discuss God's word in His very presence.

My Mother's study process was to read a passage and then find and read all of the other verses in the Bible related to the passage she was studying. This would often carry her on a journey through multiple books until she had exhausted all of the reference verses she could find. Sometimes going five or six layers deep before she would finally say "That's what it means." It was not unusual for my Mom to spend weeks on the same passage as she searched for clues throughout God's word. Why? Because she understood that when we read God's word it is not a simple drive-by, but it is a process of seeking God's face as He leads you through the scripture. That's exactly how I study Revelation. The text you are about to read includes hundreds of Old Testament and New Testament references related to Revelation. Frankly, I could have included hundreds more but elected to include the ones I felt brought the level of depth we needed in a Sunday School lesson. In some cases, I provided reference verses for clarity but in others I sought to show the amazing connection across verses, across books and across prophets all speaking of the same event. When we see this type of connection through the Bible is when we really begin to understand the interrelationship across scripture. But -- we have to look for it. God does not expect us to simply read a verse and move on. He expects us to prayerfully study as we seek Him and seek to understand. Unless you do that the Bible will not fully reveal itself to you, but once you learn to study that way it will be the most exciting journey you will ever take.

I used a very systematic process for studying Revelation before I ever thought about teaching it:

- First, I studied through the book many, many times.
- I read commentaries, watched sermon series, and studied the writings of many conservative scholars -- but most importantly, I prayerfully studied through the entire book asking the Holy Spirit to lead me and to help me never teach anything that was not in His will.
- I cut no corners. I studied every verse and every word (every one) in detail. Often in the original Greek in order to better understand the meaning.
- I then studied all of the names of God in Revelation - The "...Lamb, looking as if he had been slain...", the "...Alpha and Omega...", the one "...who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty...", "...him who holds the seven stars in his right hand...", "...him who has a double-edged sword...", "...him who is holy and true...". There are over 60 names and descriptions in Revelation related to the Lord. I searched, found and studied each one.
- I then studied all of the characters of Revelation - The "Four Living Creatures...", the "...Twenty-Four Elders...", the "...voice of many...", the "...souls of those who had been slain...", the "...great multitude...". I believe you could spend years studying just the characters in Revelation. There are dozens; some are obvious who they are and others elusive, but in all cases they are important and it is important for us to understand why God included them in the story.
- I studied through the Olivet Discourse - Christ's summary of end-times events. I studied the version in Mark, Matthew and Luke and then I linked all the verses together and studied them as a whole.
- I then wrote a summary of the entire book with a short description of each chapter.
- I then drew a timeline from Genesis to Revelation and highlighted key events along the way related to end-times prophecy. The timeline also sequenced various events in Revelation itself.

The timeline included in these notes is incomplete. It is my desire to continue developing this in as much detail as I possibly can, but that is a task for another day.

- After all this, I felt I might be ready to teach it. So, one Sunday I told my class where I was in my study and asked them to pray about when I should start teaching Revelation. I warned them it might take a couple of years and some of them might not be willing to spend so much time on one book. But when I looked up and I saw one of my class members, a true student of God's word, she looked me right in the eye and said "It's time. Teach it now." So, I did. Never realizing it would take us 136 weeks to complete. In fact, in one of my first lessons I told the class not to worry because we were not going to study the book one verse at a time. But I was wrong, and that's exactly what we did. We studied one verse at a time. Just the way God wrote it.

As a side note - The Book of Revelation requires diligent and devoted study because it is complicated - maybe more than any other book in the Bible. At first, it seems overly complicated, filled with imagery and symbolism that some feel is too confusing. But it's not. God would not have promised us a blessing from reading, hearing and studying, and then make it too complicated to read, hear and study. To the contrary, it is the imagery that helps us more clearly understand what God is teaching us. For example, the four horses in chapter 6 - often called "The Four Horses of the Apocalypse" does not mean the antichrist, war, pestilence and death will ride across the earth on real horses. But the use of the word "horse" would help nearly everyone from any culture, time period or education level understand what God is saying. The term "horse" gives us a mental image of power and speed. Nearly anyone from any culture could read the word "horse" and paint an image in their mind that these judgments will come on the earth with lightning speed and great power and force, trampling everything in their path. Once we get our head around the image of a horse it makes it so much easier to grasp its full meaning. We will see that throughout Revelation. But on the other hand, I believe most of the characters and events are not symbolic and will happen just as they are written. Many times the Apostle John will say, "I saw" instead of saying "I dreamed" or "I imagined". I believe this gives indication that is further emphasized when the angel says to John, "these words are faithful and true" and the Lord God of the Holy Prophets sent his angel to show His servants the things must shortly take place. (Revelation 22:6).

One last comment on studying Revelation -- I implore you to please stay off YouTube and Facebook. Social media is full of false and heretical doctrine with sensational doomsday predictions and Bible "scholars" who use the Book of Revelation to spread fear and false doctrine. Jesus warned us, "...and many false-prophets will appear and deceive many people...". (Matthew 24:11). Paul further emphasizes this when he says, "...For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work..." (2 Thessalonians 2:7). And most clearly Paul warns of a time when man will seek what he wants to hear through, "...godless chatter..." and "...their teaching will spread like gangrene..." (2 Timothy 2:17). "For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear." (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Please, study God's word and allow Him to speak to your heart. Use commentaries from known, conservative Bible scholars who focus intently on Revelation. And please, please, stay off social media and the hysteria of false teaching that is growing more and more every day.

How I Dealt with Controversial Topics:

There are many topics in Revelation that are certainly debatable. Even amongst learned conservative scholars there are areas of disagreement. What I have tried to do in this narrative is give an honest accounting of various positions, explaining as best I could the merits of each one. Then I clearly explain where my heart lands and why. Since we can't be dogmatic about a lot of these topics, I felt that was the best way to address them. I hope this helps you through your own study.

Key Sources:

My first, primary and most important source is God's word. I search God's word prayerfully and seek understanding through the work of the Holy Spirit. I do that before I use any other resource. That said, I have used many resources in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of what Biblical scholars believe -- and why. But rather than focus on what they agree to I look for areas where they do not agree. That way I can understand opposing views, and why they disagree, so I can make a more informed and prayerful decision myself. I only use the work of conservative scholars and teachers who have written extensively on end-times eschatology and the Book of Revelation. Many of these men have spent their lives in the study of Revelation and have gained many insights and developed solid scripture-based positions. But even so, I use them only as a cross-reference and as a source for understanding why scholars disagree on specific points. My source is God's word and the prayer that accompanies my study. Yet here again I will ask you to please avoid social media and the false teaching that abounds.

Here is a listing of trusted sources for your own study:

David Jeremiah - Pastor of Shadow Mountain Baptist Church in El Cajon, California. A true student of Revelation and founder of the Prophecy Academy and author of numerous books and sermons on end-times events. He is a very thoughtful and conservative Bible scholar.

John MacArthur - Pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley California since 1969. Author of many books on prophecy topics and has recorded sermon series that goes through an exhaustive study of Revelation. Although we differ on a couple of theological positions, I believe him to be one of the most learned Revelation scholars of our day.

Amir Tsarfati - A Jewish Christian from Israel, international conference speaker, Bible teacher and founder of "Behold Israel". I first began listening to Amir because he hosted a conservative, Middle Eastern news broadcast, but I quickly came to appreciate his focus on Revelation - particularly as it applies to Israel - and his conservative Biblical views. I find Amir's teaching and news broadcasts refreshing because he is down-to-earth and seems to work hard at providing an accurate scripture-based message.

Marv Rosenthal (1935-2022) - An American Jewish Christian and founder of "Zion's Fire". A publication that often focuses on the study of end-times events and the Book of Revelation.

J. Dwight Pentecost (1915-2014) - Distinguished Professor of Bible Exposition Emeritus at Dallas Theological Seminary. He taught for over 60 years and authored many books including "Things to Come" (1958). It is probably the most complicated and comprehensive commentary on Revelation I have ever read, but I have found it to be a valuable reference document.

Oliver Greene (1915-1976) - A well-known evangelist for many years who founded "The Gospel Hour" program that is still syndicated today on over 80 international radio stations and the internet. In the 1960's Greene wrote a series of small pamphlets on many doctrinal topics including Revelation.

I have found that every time I read Revelation and dig back into end-times prophecy I learn something new. That's why this study is so exciting. If I could ask but one thing of you ---- read Revelation. Read it over and over. Read it out loud. Read it and think. Read it and ponder. Read it and pray for understanding. Read it and seek to find Jesus. Write down your thoughts and questions. If you do your homework this study will open your eyes to the Bible like never before. Remember --- "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take it to heart what is written in it, for the time is near." (Revelation 1:2-3).

Please don't miss out on this amazing blessing God has promised you.

A word of caution --- scripture in Revelation is highly debated. I've done the best I can to represent what I believe it means and have back-checked my thoughts with many sources. That certainly doesn't mean we'll always agree. In fact, I'm sure we won't. It also doesn't mean we'll clearly understand everything in detail. So as we go through our study I want us to do our very best to diligently review and cross-reference scripture with scripture. That way we may still disagree or not understand but at least we'll know what the word says about it. So let's approach this study with the understanding that Revelation and end-times is debated amongst the best scholars (of which I am not). When we get to sections where there are multiple views we'll discuss them all, but the one I'll focus on is the view where my research and prayer has landed me.

Note: Unless otherwise noted scripture quotes come from the New International Version (NIV). Although I do my own study using several versions I have found the NIV to be an easy to read and understand. However, the entire document is currently being updated to reflect the New Kin James Version and should be available in late 2025.

LESSON #1

Mark, Chapter 13

Our study of Revelation doesn't actually start in Revelation. Instead, we will begin in Mark Chapter 13. I thought for a long time about how to best teach Revelation. Its depth and complexity coupled with related prophecy throughout the Old and New Testaments can be difficult to study, but at the same time it provides insight into events we often call the "end-times". These are some of the most important, yet amazing complex and hotly debated passages in the entire Bible. Passages that deserve far more attention to detail than we would normally go to in a Bible study setting. That said, given the geopolitical events unfolding around the world and particularly in the Middle East it is critically important for us to understand how political maneuvering seems to be moving the world towards God's end-times fulfillment. So we'll start our study with the Lord's words in Mark but then quickly move beyond that opening text into the Book of Revelation. At no more time in our history has this study been more important.

Mark's Context:

The sermon in Mark Chapter 13 is often called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus was on the Mount of Olives when He presented it. As we'll see, the choice of this location was no accident and is in itself a pointer to events yet to come. In addition to Mark 13, this sermon is also documented in Matthew 24 and Luke 19. In our study we'll review all three together to gain a clearer understanding of Christ's intended meaning. As we do we'll journey through volumes of prophetic scripture throughout both the Old and New Testaments; especially in Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. When combined, they will provide a window into events that have already occurred, are happening now, or will be fulfilled in the future.

In summary, these events include:

- Past -- The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD70 (Luke 19:41-44),
- Past -- The subsequent scattering of Israel's people across the world leading to the absence of Israel as a geopolitical nation, (similar to the earlier events in 2 Kings 17:23 / Deuteronomy 28:64-67),
- Past and Present -- A time of great persecution and suffering for both Jews and Gentile believers, cataclysmic natural disasters, and false teachers who are emerging in greater numbers than ever before as they try to turn mankind away from the truth of the gospel. We're already seeing these events today but they will escalate even more prior to Christ's return (Matthew 10:16-23),
- Present -- The re-gathering of Jews as a people and the rebirth of Israel as a strong nation, (Happening now! - Ezekiel 37:15-28 / Isaiah 11:12 / Hosea 1:11 / 3:5),
- Future -- The Rapture, when believers, both dead and still living will be gathered to Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 / 5:9),
- Future -- Seven years of Tribulation. A terrible time on earth after believers are gathered to the Lord. "...those are the days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again." (Mark 13:19). This period will see the rise of satan's instrument - the antichrist - who is already at work (1 John 4:3) and his

"...abomination that causes desolation..." which will occur when he enters the new temple in Jerusalem and declares himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 / Revelation 3:10 / 7:14). We are given a precursor view of this in an earlier abomination that occurred in the second century BC when the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig to the god zeus on the temple altar (Daniel 9:27 / 11:31 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4),

- Future -- Christ's Second Coming and the containment of satan (Revelation 19:11-21 / 20:2-3),
- Future -- A thousand years of Jesus' Millennial reign on earth (Revelation 20:6),
- Future -- The release of satan one last time (Revelation 20:7),
- Future -- The final battle for the earth, satan defeated, and the destruction of all that is evil (Revelation 20:7 / Ezekiel 38),
- Future - The "Great White Throne Judgment" for the eternal punishment of those who rejected Christ (Revelation 20:8-10),
- Future -- The New Heaven, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem (Revelation chapter 21),
- And Finally -- An eternal home for us - His faithful followers - with Jesus in His new kingdom.

Looking Back and Yearning Forward:

So what does all this have to do with modern day Israel? Simply, none of this could happen if the Nation of Israel did not exist.

- "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the people; the nations will rally to Him, and His resting place will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of His people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylon, from Hamath and from the Islands of the Mediterranean. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth." (Isaiah 11:10-12).
- "At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own heart." (Jeremiah 3:17).
- "Then the Lord will go out to fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. And on that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea, in summer and winter alike. ON THAT DAY THE LORD WILL BECOME KING OVER ALL THE EARTH - THE LORD ALONE AND HIS NAME ALONE." (Zechariah 14:3-5 and 8).

This is why Israel and Jerusalem are so important to End-Times-Prophecy and why they must be important to us. In fact, there are few if any modern-day geopolitical, economic or governmental events that are more important to us than the rebirth of Israel and the recognition of Jerusalem as its political capital. That's because it is there that the Second Coming of Jesus will occur.

But...before Israel and Jerusalem could be re-gathered, they first they must be destroyed. --- Mark Chapter 13 starts with a discussion of the temple in Jerusalem. The Disciples were amazed by its size, which is understandable since several of his followers were from outlying regions and would

not be accustomed to buildings like this. In fact, even though all that remains today are principally the foundation stones that make up the Western or "Wailing Wall", it is still an impressive sight. Construction of the second temple was started by Herod the Great in 20 BC to replace the first temple built by Solomon and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. It was still under construction at the time of Christ's ministry and at that time may have been the largest structure in the ancient world. Impressive by any standard, it was made of stone blocks as large as 12'x40', with much of the temple covered with pure white marble and the entire eastern wall sheathed in gold plates to reflect the rising sun. Given its size and ornamentation it must have seemed unbelievable to the Disciples when Jesus told them that no stone would be left on top of another. But how could this be?

Earlier that week Jesus had made His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem and we see His reaction to the people, (Mark 11 / Matthew 21 / Luke 19). --- "As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and your children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.'" (Luke 19:41-44). -- Although the people momentarily praised His name when He entered the city, Jesus knew the celebration was short-lived and misdirected. He also knew that as a consequence of failing to recognize Him as the Messiah, Israel and Jerusalem would be destroyed, the people would be scattered across the earth for centuries, and the land God gave Abraham would be controlled by nations and dynasties that were enemies of God. At this point the Nation of Israel (the place of Christ's future return) would basically cease to exist for almost 2,000 years. This was a destruction precipitated by the people and Jewish leaders alike. Both by failing to honor Jesus and by revolting against Rome. In AD66 Judea revolted against the insane Roman emperor Nero. In response, he commanded Vespasian to restore order, who then sent his son Titus as the army's commander. By AD68 the northern provinces had been destroyed and Rome turned its attention on Jerusalem. Then in AD70, just as Jesus had said, the Roman army surrounded the city, cut off all food and water supplies, stormed the walls, destroyed the massive temple, killed an estimated one million Jews and sent hundreds of thousands to labor camps as workers or to the coliseums for blood sport. This is the destruction Jesus predicted as punishment for Israel's disobedience.

For all intent and purposes Israel and Jerusalem no longer belonged to the Jews. Jerusalem, the place God sent Abram hundreds of years before (Genesis 14:18). Jerusalem, the seat of David's eternal throne (2 Samuel 7:13), Jerusalem, the place of return for the second advent of Christ and the location of His millennial reign (Revelation 20:4). Jerusalem, the new city of Christ's kingdom; a city that "...does not need the sun or the moon to shine light on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its light." (Revelations 21:2 / 21:23). This city, the chosen seat of the Messiah, was wicked beyond belief. An unfaithfulness that would bring death and destruction just as Jesus had said (Luke 19:42-44). For centuries Jews and Christians alike came under severe persecution as Jerusalem changed hands many times between the victors of warring states. One of the oldest and most contested cities in the world, Jerusalem has been attacked 52 times, captured 44 times, besieged 23 times and destroyed twice. All because it is considered to be a place of great religious significance by Jews, Christians and Muslims; all who consider it to be their own holy land. Jews because it is the historical seat of David, Christians, because it is the place of the

crucifixion, resurrection and the future site of Christ's new kingdom, and muslims whose traditions (the Hadith) teach that Muhammad ascended to heaven from Jerusalem's temple mount. From the time of the Romans, through the Persians, Syrians, Ottomans, European Crusaders, and now the Arab-States and Russia, Israel and Jerusalem stand as the most coveted and fought-over parcel of land on earth. That's why it's so important for us to understand the prophetic connection between Mark chapter 13 and events occurring today that fulfill Biblical prophecy like never before.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews were scattered to the four corners of the earth, and everywhere they went they were subject to persecution and genocide. We're most familiar with the demonic exploits of Adolf Hitler and his "Ultimate Solution" but he was just one of many rulers in history who persecuted Jews wherever they lived. Christian believers have also gone through persecution, particularly today, when we are persecuted and martyred in greater numbers than ever before. It's estimated that in 2019, 4,136 Christians were killed (that's 11 a day), 1,266 churches were destroyed and 2,625 Christians were imprisoned. It is also estimated that around the world 245 million Christians are currently under persecution in nations that are sworn enemies of God. These are not statistics from the Roman Empire. This is happening right now, today, to brothers and sisters of ours around the world. This is the hatred Jesus spoke about in Mark chapter 13. And the only thing that will stop this level of persecution is the Rapture, when Jesus brings His people home. But persecution will begin again during the tribulation when the antichrist seeks to destroy all new followers of Christ (Revelation 13:7).

Since the time of Christ's ministry on earth each successive generation has hoped the Rapture would occur during their lifetimes. Although we love our lives here on earth and we love our family and friends, the truth is we should be looking - eagerly yearning - for the sound of the trumpet with eager anticipation. Not the anticipation of heaven as a place, but the anticipation of being with our Lord. We tend to think of heaven and hell from the perspective that one is good and one is bad, or that one brings eternal suffering and one brings eternal joy. But neither of those are the reasons we should want to go to heaven. The reason for going to heaven is to be in the presence of God. The reason for not wanting to go to hell is because you'd be eternally separated from God. Imagine an eternity where you could no longer pray, no longer read God's word, no longer feel His presence or receive His blessings. To me that would be so much worse than pain and suffering. For this we yearn for the Rapture so we can be with the Lord forever.

Even the Disciples wondered "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel." (Acts 1:1-11). Naturally, they hoped it would be soon because for the first time since they started following Jesus, they would be alone. Alone in a hostile world that hated them and would come to hate them even more (Mark 13:13). But God didn't leave them nor forsake them (Hebrews 13:5) but promised that He would "...come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11). Then, at Pentecost, God the Spirit came upon them just as God the Son had been with them. - Just as He does with us. (Acts 2:1-4). From that point on believers in every generation have looked with anticipation to the day when our Lord will return and either reunite our spirits with our dead bodies or for the living, bring us to Him in the air, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). This is the Rapture, when Jesus returns (this time in

the air and not yet to establish His kingdom) to gather His people to heaven prior to the start of the Great Tribulation. The start of the eventual destruction of satan.

As Gentile believers we must understand that Bible prophecy and end-time events focus specifically on Israel as the linchpin to the Rapture and His Second Coming. Christ may return today or He may return in a thousand years. We just don't know. But what we do know is that God is maneuvering Israel into a place they have not been for over 2,000 years. A place they must be in for His return to occur. The Bible includes over 300 prophecies related to the Messiah's first advent, and over three times that many related to the second. Many of these prophecies provide indicators of things to come that we may not have ever recognized. For example, have you ever thought about the fact that the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), speaks of a time - the Millennium - when Jesus will reign as King on earth for 1,000 years? Listen to what it says, -- "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." -- Think about that...since the pre-fall days of Adam and Eve at no time on earth has God's kingdom been established to the point His will was carried out here just as it is in heaven. But it will someday, when He sets up His kingdom in the future when "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). This is the period of the thousand-year reign before Jesus destroys satan, judges the wicked and creates "...a New Heaven and a New Earth and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven..." (Revelation 21:1-2). Do you see how all of this is related to Israel and the international recognition of Jerusalem as the Jewish capital? Because, "On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will split in two from east to west...". -- When Christ returns victorious He will stand in Jerusalem and make it His throne (Zechariah 14:4 / Acts 1:11-12).

Think about how many times we've studied the promises God made to Israel and his future Kingdom. Here are a few:

- "The Lord said to Abram..."...I will make you into a great nation..." (Genesis 12:1-2)
- And He said to Jacob, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. (Genesis 28:13)
- "God said to him, 'Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.'" (Genesis 35:10)
- "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be His treasured possession." (Deuteronomy 14:2)
- "On the same day the Lord told Moses, "Go up into the Abarim Range in Mount Nebo in Moab, across from Jericho, and view Canaan, the land I am giving the Israelites as their own possession." (Deuteronomy 32:49)
- "...and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (2 Samuel 7:13)
- "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." (Luke 1:32-33)
- "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace. On the throne of David and over His kingdom." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

- Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you." (Zechariah 9:9)
- "You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and You, Lord, have become their God." (2 Samuel 7:24)
- "I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from their countries, and I will bring them into their own land..." (Ezekiel 34:13)
- "...and I will bring my people Israel back from exile..." "...I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God." (Amos 9:14-15)

So let's pull these together to understand why current events are so important. -- God chose Israel as His nation; His messenger to the world. Throughout the Old Testament God was extraordinarily patient with Israel. Even in their most sinful days He sought them out. But eventually, and after centuries of cyclic obedience and disobedience God - Jesus - came to earth to find the lost sheep of Israel and give them a chance to come back to Him. (Matthew 10:6 / Jeremiah 50:6 / Luke 15:4). But as we've seen throughout the Book of Mark they rebelled, so Jesus, the Lamb of God, became the atoning and substitutionary sacrifice when He gave His life and was resurrected to save not only the Jew but also the Gentile. Israel was then destroyed and "You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste." (Leviticus 26:33 / Deuteronomy 4:27 / Psalms 106:27...). And now we await the Second Coming of Christ when He will first Rapture His people to Him, usher in seven years of Tribulation, establish His throne during the Millennium, release the captive satan, destroy him and all who do not know Jesus, and then establish His new eternal kingdom for those faithful to Him. And what is key to all of this? Israel. Jesus will return to Israel; specifically, Jerusalem to reign as the King of kings over His kingdom. Don't let anyone fool you into believing Israel is no longer important and that the "church" has somehow transplanted itself in place of Israel. The so called "Replacement Theology" is false and entirely unbiblical. Yes, the church is an important instrument of God's will and message, but it does not replace Israel. If it did, we could read all of the verses above and assume God was just kidding. But He was not. To this day Israel remains largely disobedient, but make no mistake about it, Jesus will restore the Nation of Israel and Jesus will return to Jerusalem to establish His reign. As Paul told the persecuted church at Rome "I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means! "...and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob [Israel]. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'" (Romans 11:1 / 26-27 / Isaiah 59:20-21). So that's why Israel is so critically important to Christians. Because for Jesus to return to Jerusalem there must be an Israel; a country that did not exist for almost 2,000 years.

But then something prophetically Biblical happened. Harry Truman, President of the United States became uneasy about the potential for a post-war alignment between the emerging Soviet Union and the Arab States. Oil had been discovered everywhere in the Middle East except Israel, and everyone wanted it. In response to this, and given the plight of the Jewish people who had been killed or scattered by the Holocaust, the US sought national sovereignty for the Jewish people and a Jewish homeland. After much debate, in 1948 the United Nations General Assembly issued Resolution 181, the "United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine". This was followed in 1950 by the Tripartite Declaration between the US, England and France agreeing to defend the territories

of Israel. The nation of Israel was re-born and 806,000 displaced Jews from around the world ("the four corners") settled in the land promised to Abraham. This was critically important because Christ will return to Jerusalem, in Israel and for the first time in almost 2,000 years Israel now existed again. Now fast forward 71 years - The population of Israel has grown to millions of people, and for the first time since the earthly ministry of Jesus there are more Jews in Israel than any other single place on earth. Feeding that growth is the fact that Israel has the highest birthrate in the world; over three times the average for the rest of the world. Israel's death rate is one of the lowest of all nations and their life expectancy is one of the highest - 8th out of all the countries on earth. They are the 2nd most talked-about nation in the media. Second only to the United States. And prospering this growing population is one of the strongest economies in the world, 6th amongst all nations. Which has an opportunity to grow even more with the advent of the EastMed natural gas pipeline linking Israel's "Leviathan Field" to commerce in Europe. And on top of all that, President Trump issued an Executive Order recognizing Israel's rights over the hotly contested Golan Heights which borders Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Not only is this high ground an important strategic location for Israel's military, but it also provides one third of Israel's water and may be a future source of Israeli oil. It is yet another piece to the puzzle.

So how is it that a nation smaller than New Jersey now has the fastest growing population on earth and 6th highest economic standing after only 70 years? Very simple, because God promised, "...and I will bring my people Israel back from exile..." "...I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God." (Amos 9:14-15).

And...as we watch...

- The European Union - Now with open borders, an emerging constitution and common currency is a consolidation of city-states and territories. Much of it originally part of the old Roman empire. This may be a source of Gog and Magog who -- "In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounding the camp of God's people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them." (Revelation 20:7-10 / Ezekiel 38-39 / Jeremiah 3:17).
- The US has announced our first permanent military base in Israel.
- March 2019 - the US recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. - This is a BIG DEAL - For the first time in almost 2,000 years Jerusalem is designated the capital of God's Jewish nation.

"End-Times Prophecy" has always been a topic of discussion and debate, but probably no more so than it is today. Several prominent and conservative American pastors spend a great deal of time focused on Bible prophecy as it relates to the Rapture and later the Second Advent of Christ. Hundreds of books (often conflicting) have been published in an attempt to explain prophetic scripture. Prophecy conferences and seminars are frequently conducted around the world and several Christian-Jewish pastors and Israeli-based Christian groups are laser focused on current events and their relationship to the return of Jesus. Why? Because today, more than any other time in history, current events are circling around the affairs of the Nation of Israel like never before.

Will Jesus return soon? We don't know. But what is evident is the fact God is moving in the Middle East. Events are occurring exactly as the Bible predicts they will. Whether Jesus returns tomorrow

or in a thousand years is unknown to us. But what is known to us are the signs Jesus talks about in chapter 13. Be alert, watch the news, pray for Israel, and remember...

"If He comes suddenly, do not let Him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone; Watch!" (Mark 13:36).

"Look, I am coming soon!" "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:12/20).

LESSON #2

In preparation for our study of Revelation and end-times prophecy I developed the attached chart to align the scripture from Mark 13, Matthew 24 and Luke 21 so we can see the combined details from all three (See Attachment). This will be an invaluable tool as we work through Revelation and frequently refer back to these chapters to reflect on what Jesus was talking about.

There are over 900 prophecies in the Old Testament related to the "Last Days" or end-times. These come together and are revealed to us through the book of Revelation. Although these prophecies are often difficult to identify and understand I don't believe God put them there to confuse us. I believe He intends for us to understand them. But understanding them takes time and effort for diligent study. Time most people (and even many pastors) are unwilling to spend. That's why a large percentage of believers simply read the verses -- if they ever read them at all -- and are satisfied with the fact they don't understand. As a result, most pastors, teachers and believers tend to steer clear of Revelation. It's easier to just accept it for whatever it means and not get caught-up in debate and confusion. I was the same way for a long time and used to think it really didn't matter how it all turned out because it would work out the way God wanted it to. But as I began to spend more time studying the character of Jesus I came to understand how much I was missing because I didn't study Jesus as He is revealed in Revelation. Here we see His full character; as the sole source of continued grace and love, but also as Chief Judge of the world and the final destroyer of all evil and sin -- including all unbelievers. Given that fact, I now believe that unless you study Revelation and the End-Times actions of Christ you will not have a full appreciation for who Jesus really is. --- "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10).

And for that reason, even the most basic understanding of Revelation will boost the strength and confidence of your faith like never before.

God inspired Revelation and end-times scripture knowing full well it would be challenging. He also knew He expects us to study His scripture and --- "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) --- In other words, scripture - all scripture - should be a continuous focus in our life. To the point we can understand them well enough to "impress" (clearly explain) them to others. Granted, Revelation's scripture takes lots of study to impress the meaning buried within, but once you start to break it down and truly seek to understand, it literally comes to life. So much so it can quickly become an obsession as you recognize there are hundreds of scripture references you need to find and connect. As God begins to reveal His purposes through His revelation of Jesus you begin to learn new and exciting things. And the more you learn the more you realize how much more there is to know. It's a circular story that builds and builds upon itself like no other.

But that's exactly what our Lord expects us to get out of Revelation. He was pretty clear about that when discussing the last days in the Olivet Discourse and told the Apostles --- "...let the reader understand..." (Mark 13:14 / Matthew 24:15). He further emphasized His point in Matthew 24:32 with a more direct command --- "Now learn this lesson..." --- So who is the "reader" He's talking about and what is the lesson He expects us to learn? The readers were certainly not the Apostles. They didn't read it; they were there listening to Him speak. The reader Jesus is referring to is us.

Actually, the Jews first and then Gentile believers, but we are the ones He tells to read what He said so we can understand what He means. He carries this even further at the beginning of Revelation when He promises --- "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." (Revelation 1:3). Given this promise why would anyone avoid the study of scripture that brings with it such a beautiful blessing from God? We shouldn't. We should do exactly what Jesus said -- read it (study), hear it (discuss) and heed it (apply). Then the blessings of understanding will come as promised. The blessing of a more complete view of Jesus and the strengthening of our faith that comes from the story of our Lord's ultimate victory. But achieving this blessing requires setting aside ample time for a diligent study of Revelation and the related prophecy of the Old Testament. Jesus explains how important this is when He cites the prophecy of Daniel in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:15). Then once you go to Daniel, you'll find he studied the prophecy of Jeremiah --- "I, Daniel, understood from the scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet..." (Daniel 9:2). So why was Daniel seeking to understand? Because he knew from scripture the time was near for Israel's exile to end and he wanted to understand what God intended to do (Daniel 9:17-19). But more importantly, note what Daniel said, --- "...I, Daniel UNDERSTOOD from the SCRIPTURE..." "...according to the WORD of the Lord...". He didn't understand because Jesus simply explained it to him. He understood by reading the scripture. So, if Daniel had to read prophecy in order to understand God's future plan for His people then why would we be any different? We're not. Peter emphasized this when he said --- "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets..." (2 Peter 3:2). Point being, how can we recall (think back and meditate) on scripture we've never studied.

Jesus explained the end-times in great detail but He did so in a way that forces us to search the scripture and piece it together. But it is through this study, and only through this study, will we find the depth and breadth of who our Savior really is. If we're content to only understand Jesus up through His resurrection, but don't seek to understand what He plans to do in the future, then we are not truly seeking an understanding of our Lord. Jesus is clear about this when He tells us we'll find Him only IF we --- "...seek me with all your heart..." (Jeremiah 29:13). Simply reading scripture and writing it off as complicated isn't seeking Him with all of our hearts, and as Jeremiah implies, we are not going to "find" Jesus unless we're willing to search for Him. Daniel could have simply accepted scripture as being too hard to understand. Instead, He studied and prayed and was given the understanding God wanted him to have through the prophecy of someone who had come before. I believe He will do the same for us.

Think about it this way --- After His resurrection Jesus met two disciples on the road. They were downtrodden and confused. They simply could not understand what had happened to Jesus and what lay before them. Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith and how quickly they failed to recall -- "...the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets..." (2 Peter 3:2) -- "How foolish you are..." He said to them, "...and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25). He then explained what He wanted them to know by "...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets [the Old Testament], He explained to them what was said in all Scriptures concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27). The disciples began to understand, not from a simplified explanation, but from recalling what was said in prophecy. As a result, their - "...hearts burned within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us." (Luke 24:32) ----

So let's take a lesson from this and do what Jesus said. Let's walk along the road of Revelation and let our hearts burn with desire as He reveals a story like no other.

So we're not going to fall in the trap of sitting Revelation aside. Instead, we're going on a quest. A quest to go further and deeper into scripture than we have ever gone before. And in doing so I'm convinced God will open our hearts to an understanding we've never had and a strength we've never felt. The study of Revelation and end-times prophecy will take us through the Bible on an amazing journey of discovery through nearly every book of the Old Testament including Genesis. A journey that's required for us to comply with God's command to --- "Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." (Isaiah 46:9-10).

So let's go study the "...former things..." so we may be able to learn more about the events that are "...still to come."

Comparison of the Olivet Discourse

June 2019

Mark Chapter 13	Matthew Chapter 24	Luke Chapter 21
1As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" 2"Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." 3As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4"Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" 5Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 6Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. 7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. 9"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. 12"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' ^a standing where it ^b does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19because those will be days of distress unequaled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again.	1Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2"Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." 3As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" 4Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. 6You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8All these are the beginning of birth pains. 9"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. 15"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' ^a spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. 18Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 19How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.	5Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 6"As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down." 7"Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" 8He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. 9When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." 10Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. 12"But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. 13And so you will bear testimony to me. 14But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. 15For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. 16You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17Everyone will hate you because of me. 18But not a hair of your head will perish. 19Stand firm, and you will win life. 20"When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. 22For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 23How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 25"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

Comparison of the Olivet Discourse

June 2019

Mark Chapter 13	Matthew Chapter 24	Luke Chapter 21
20"If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. 21At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. 22For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. 24"But in those days, following that distress, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' ^c 26"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. 28"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it ^dis near, right at the door. 30Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.	22"If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 23At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25See, I have told you ahead of time. 26"So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the wilderness,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. 29"Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' ^b 30"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth ^ewill mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. ^d31And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. 32"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it ^eis near, right at the door. 34Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.	27At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32"Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Timeline:

I thought a lot about the best way to study and teach Revelation. We could simply do a chapter-by-chapter study, but that's just scratching the surface and would not provide the understanding we seek. I felt we needed something that would leave the class with a document they could refer to in the future. So I thought about the things that make Revelation difficult to understand. Things like the large number of characters, the complex sequence of events, and the linkage between Revelation and Old Testament prophecy. So it seemed maybe a good way to roll these together in a single document would be a timeline illustrating the sequence of Revelation events, the role each character plays in the story, and how it all fits in the broader story of prophetic Old Testament scripture. So that's what I did. I drew a timeline, as best as I understood it, to help us "see" how the pieces line up and connect.

The timeline does not include everything we will study but shows the major events from the Rapture to Judgment. I then went back to Genesis and started to lay-in key prophecies of Christ, Israel and the end-times. The intent was to link key events in Revelation with key events and prophecy in the Old Testament to flesh-out the whole story. Although it is not yet complete, I hope it's a document you'll be able to refer back to many, many times.

LESSON #3

Timeline Overview:

The timeline is fairly self-explanatory. It begins with Genesis and ends at the eternity of God's New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem. Between those bookends I've listed many scriptural references and events that in one way or another link Revelation to end-times prophecy.

Chart 1 - Creation Through Silence

This single page covers several thousand years from the time of God's initial creation through the end of the Prophetic period. We start with our first view of Jesus - Genesis 1:1-2 plus John 1:1-3. From there I highlighted scripture that in one way or another will link to or sets the stage for Revelation. Much of this is centered on Israel because they are the primary focus of Revelation. Early in the chart I show the emergence of sin and the curses that followed (on satan, on man, on the earth). We will see reference to this all through the Bible culminating in the completion of the curses in Revelation. The top half of the chart tracks the emergence of Israel, the Law, the first blood atonement and the Prophets. The bottom highlights events such as the flood (which thousands of years later Peter will relate to the end-times) and the critically important prophecy of Daniel. This page ends at the 400 years of silence between the ministry of Malachi and the arrival of John the Baptist.

Chart 2 - The Prophet John Through the Rapture

We have no idea how long this time period will last because it covers the time through to the Rapture. Certainly, events seem to be lining up for the Rapture to occur soon but the exact timing is up to God. This chart starts at the ministry of John the Baptist (the last Messianic Prophet) and the life of Jesus. There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament related to the earthly life of Christ. In the timeline I've included a sheet showing the prophecies just from the book of Isaiah alone. We will study the connection between Old Testament prophecies, the life of Christ, and pointers to Revelation. We'll also study about the Church Age - roughly, the Dispensation of Grace (which we are in) and how this relates to clues in the Olivet Discourse. We'll spend several sessions on the seven churches of Revelation that exist during the modern era and how they fit in the larger picture. Then we'll spend a time discussing the various views of the Rapture and what the Bible really says about it.

Chart 3 - The Beginning of the Tribulation

Chapter 3 covers the first half of the seven year Tribulation - from the arrival of the antichrist to the period just before the great abomination. We will spend considerable time on this portion of our study.

Chart 4 - The Abomination Through the Second Coming

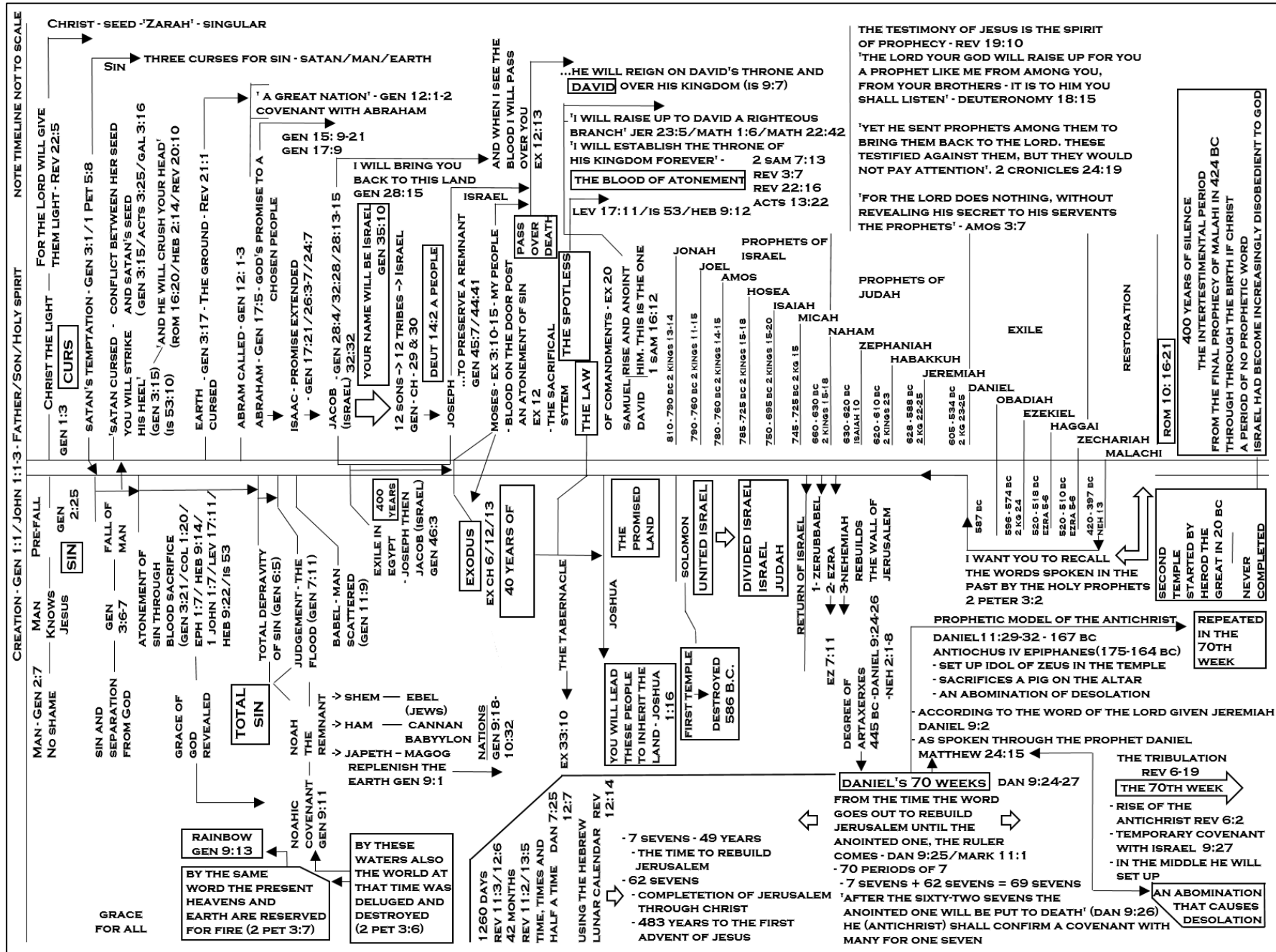
This chart and the lessons we will study will probably be the most difficult to understand but to me they are the most exciting. This is when we'll see a side of Jesus you don't normally see in the rest of the Bible. The last three Seals, culminating in the seven Trumpet judgments and seven Bowl judgments span the most evil period of satan through the antichrist to the glorious return of our Warrior Lord and His vengeance on evil. I suspect just the portion related to the seventh Seal could become several charts as we dig deeper into each phase of judgment.

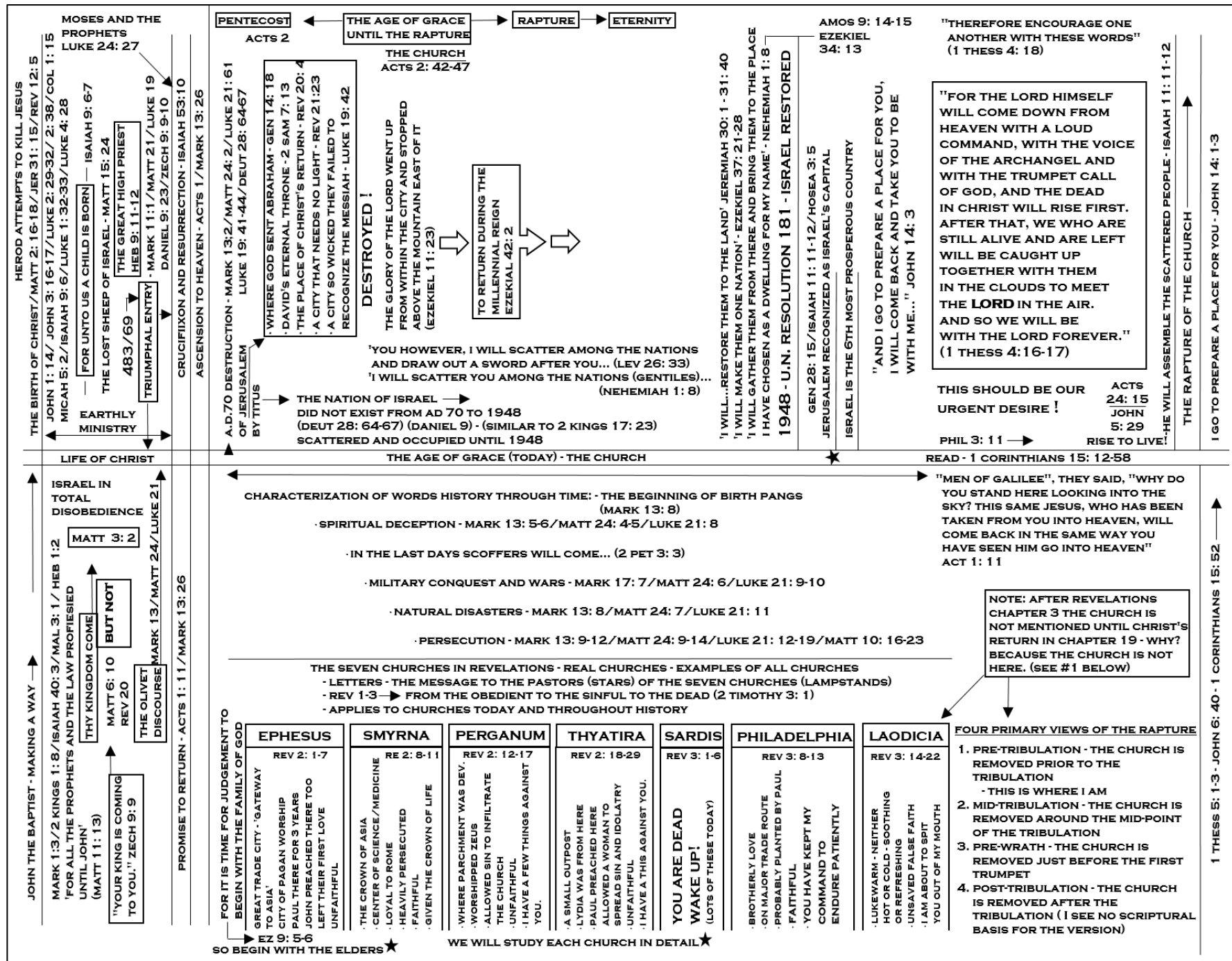
Chart 5 - The Millennial Kingdom Through Eternity.

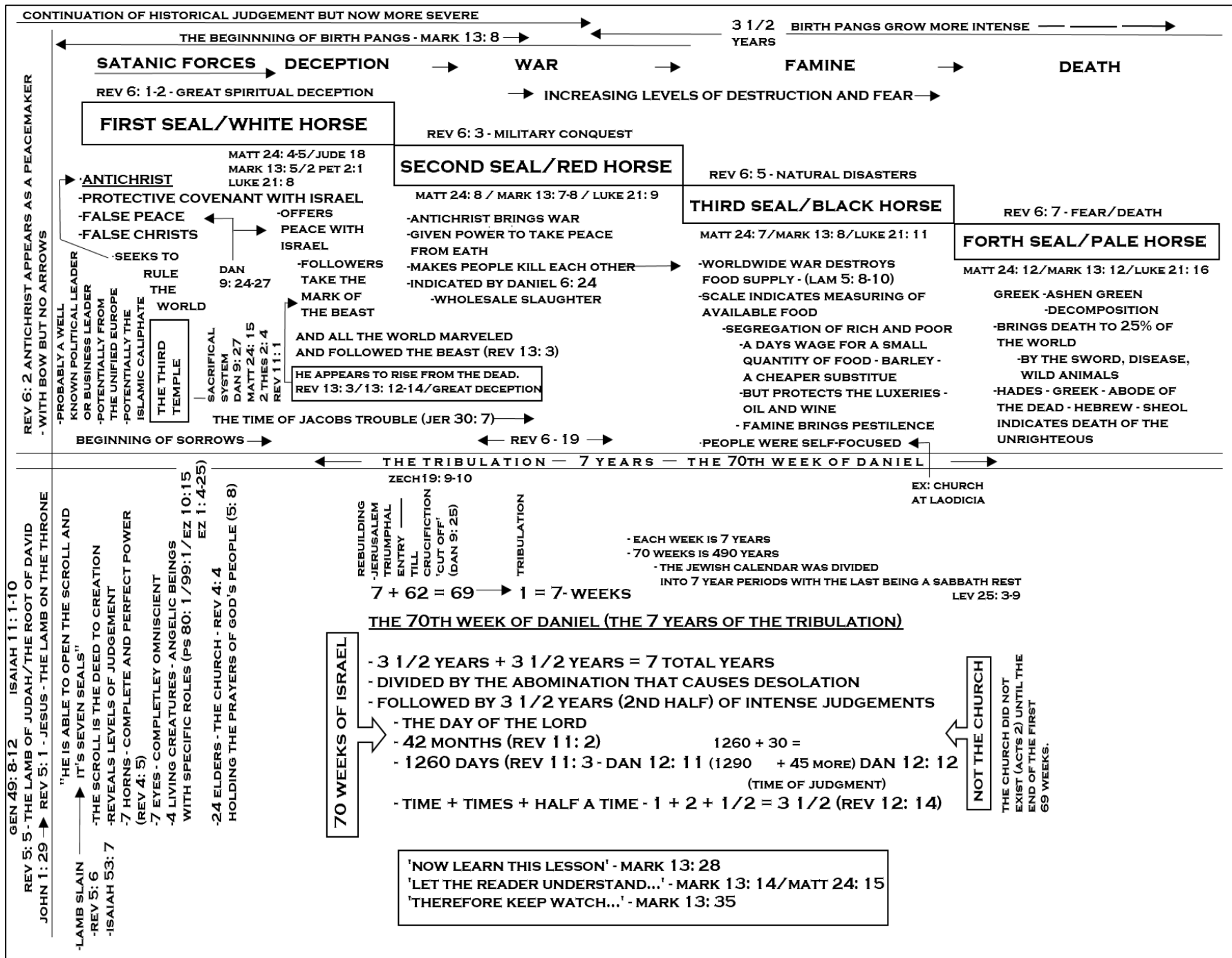
There is so much in the Bible about these future events, so for now I've captured just the basics.

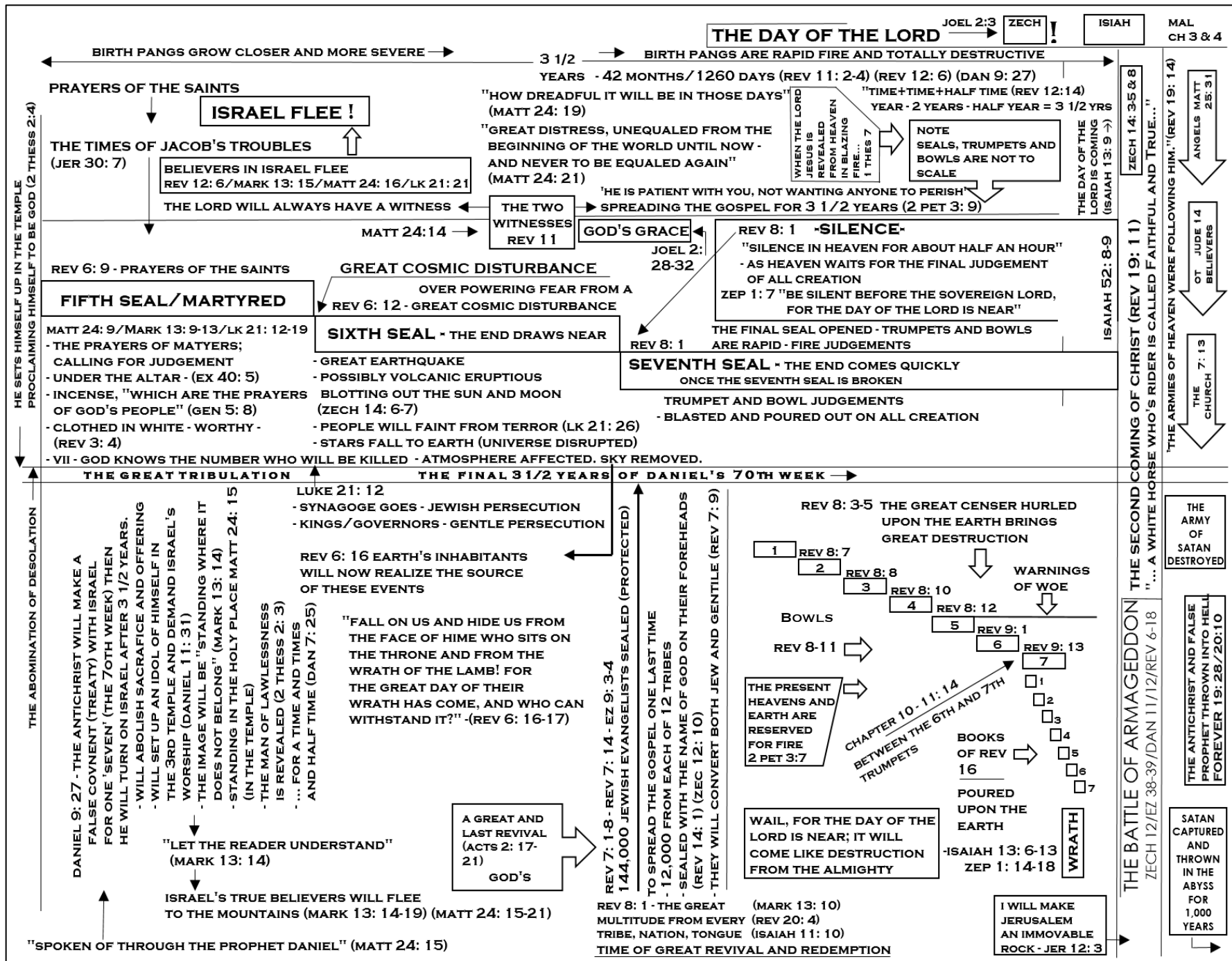
Text Charts - I've included several pages of texts to go with the charts. They are intended to help us document some of the key elements of prophecy and related scripture.

- Seals, Trumpets and Bowls -- This will be further expanded to cover the details of chapters 11-18
- The Characters of Revelation - this documents references to people or beings in Revelation. We will study each one.
- The Seven Blessings of Revelation
- The Descriptions of Jesus - This lists the various names, titles and descriptions of Jesus in Revelation
- Comparison of the Olivet Discourse - Compares the prophecy in Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21.
- The Prophecies of Christ in the book of Isaiah.









TRUMPETS AND BOWLS

GOD'S FINAL PUNISHMENTS WITHIN THE 7TH SEAL

TRUMPETS

1. HAIL AND FIRE MIXED WITH BLOOD - REV 8: 6-7
- 1/3 OF EARTH BURNED
2. A LARGE BLAZING MOUNTAIN (ASTEROID?) THROWN INTO THE SEA - REV 8: 8-9
- 1/3 OF SEA TURNED TO BLOOD
- 1/3 OF SEA LIFE DESTROYED
3. A GREAT STAR (COMET?) FELL FROM THE SKY - REV 8: 10-11
- WORMWOOD - A BITTER POISON (DT 29: 18/PR 5:4/JER 9: 15)
- 1/3 OF THE WATER TURNED POSINOUS
- MANY KILLED
4. GOD REMOVES LIGHT/POWER FROM HEAVENLY BODIES
- UNDOUBTEDLY IMPACTS CLIMATE

FIRST WOE

SECOND WOE

5. AN ANGELIC BEING (POSSIBLY SATAN) (IS 14: 12-14/LUKE 10: 18)
- THE ABYSS - PRISON FOR DEMONS (11: 7/17: 8/20: 1-3)
- HELD FOR JUDGEMENT ON THE GREAT DAY (JUDE 6: 7)
- DEMONS RELEASED UPON THE EARTH LIKE SWARMS OF LOCUS (JOEL 2)
- ORDERED TO DESTROY THOSE EXCEPT THE 144,000 AND THEIR CONVERTS (7: 4)
- LED BY A POWERFUL DEMON APOLLYON - THE DESTROYER (EPH 6: 12)
6. THE SIX SEAL RELEASES FOUR FALLEN ANGELS HELD BY GOD FOR THIS PURPOSE
- THEIR DEMONIC FORCE WAS 2 x 10,000 x 10,000
- USED FIRE, SMOKE AND SULFUR TO KILL 1/3 OF MANKIND
- THE SURVIVORS DID NOT REPENT

THE FINAL JUDGEMENT

7. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET (REV 11: 15)

- RELEASES THE 7 FINAL BOWL JUDGEMENTS
- THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE
- THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD - SATAN'S POWER
- THE KINGDOM OF THE LORD - THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF KING JESUS BEING USHERED IN

THE TIME HAS COME

- YOUR WRATH HAS COME
- BEGIN TO REIGN
- JUDGE THE DEAD
- REWARD THE FAITHFUL
- DESTROY THE UNRIGHTEOUS

BUT FIRST

CREATION MUST GO THROUGH THE 7 BOWL JUDGEMENTS

- POURED OUT UPON THE EARTH

WRATH

BOWLS

"GO POUR OUT THE 7 BOWLS OF GOD'S WATH ON THE EARTH" (REV 16: 1)

1. PLAGUES OF SORES AND BOILS UPON ALL WITH THE MARK (EX 9: 9-11/JOB 2: 7)
 2. THE SEA TURNS TO BLOOD AND SEA LIFE DIES
 3. RIVERS AND SPRINGS TURN TO BLOOD - TRUE JUDGEMENT FOR THOSE WHO SPILL BLOOD MUST DRINK BLOOD
 4. THE SUN SCORCHES THE PEOPLE - YET THEY REFUSE TO REPENT
 5. DARKNESS COMES UPON THE KINGDOM OF THE ANTICHRIST - PAIN, THIRST, SCORCHING HEAT, DARKNESS. THE PEOPLE CURSE GOD
 6. THE ARMIES OF THE EAST ARE DRAWN TOWARDS ISRAEL. THE UNHOLY TRINITY - THE DRAGON (SATAN - 12: 3), THE BEAST (THE ANTICHRIST - 11:3) AND THE FALSE PROPHET (13: 11) - SPEW FORTH A VILE, SLIMEY, EVIL - SYMBOLIZED BY FROGS (LEV 11: 10)
- THE ARMIES ARE DRAWN TO ARMAGEDDON FOR FINAL BATTLE
- FAITHFUL - STAY AWAKE! BE READY! (16: 15)
- 7TH BOWL - POURED INTO THE AIR **"IT IS DONE!"**
- AN EARTHQUAKE LIKE NEVER BEFORE
 - JERUSALEM IS SPLIT (ZECH 14: 4) THE DAY IS AT HAND
 - NATIONS AND CITIES COLLAPSE
 - THE ANTICHRIST'S KINGDOM WILL BE VIOLENTLY PUNISHED (THE SYMBOL - BABYLON (CH 17/18) (ISAIAH 13: 6-13) - THE EVIL RELIGIOUS WORLD ORDER

BETWEEN THE 6TH AND 7TH TRUMPET

THE MIGHTY ANGEL

THE TWO WITNESSES

AND THE 1444k - GOD'S GRACE

- REV 10: 11 ?
- ANOTHER MIGHTY ANGEL
 - SOME BELIEVE THIS TO BE JESUS (GEN 6: 17/22: 11-18) BUT THE USE OF "ANOTHER" INDICATES A POWERFUL ANGEL OF GOD
 - HIS FEET ON THE LAND AND SEA AFFIRM GOD IS IN CONTROL
 - SCROLL OPEN - THE FINAL JUDGEMENTS ARE NOW EXPOSED
 - HE SWORE HIS ALLEGIANCE TO GOD
- THERE WILL BE NO MORE DELAY**
- THE MYSTERY OF GOD WILL NOW BE ACCOMPLISHED - DESTRUCTION OF ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS
 - SOUR AND SWEET - THE TRUTH OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT IS BITTER TO THE UNRIGHTEOUS AND SWEET TO THE FAITHFUL
 - PROPHECY AGAIN - WARN OTHERS WHAT IS COMING

CHAPTER 11. - THE TWO WITNESSES - TWO/OLIVE TREES AND TWO LAMPSTANDS - THE LIGHT OF REVIVAL

- THE TWO WITNESSES SPREAD THE GOSPEL 3 1/2 YEAR (REV 11: 3)
- MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE SHOWS GOD'S OWNERSHIP (ZEC 2: 1-5) REV 21: 15
- A THIRD TEMPLE WILL BE BUILT PRIOR TO THE TRIBULATION (DAN 9: 27/MATT 25: 15/2 THESS 2: 4)
- THIS IS WHERE THE ANTICHRIST WILL PRESENT HIS ABOMINATION
- TODAY THERE IS A GROUP IN ISRAEL "THE TEMPLE INSTITUTE WHO WANT TO REBULD THE TEMPLE"

- SOME BELIEVE THEY MAY BE MOSES AND ELIJAH (THE LAWGIVER AND PROPHET)
- THE ANGEL MICHAEL FOUGHT SATAN OVER THE BODY OF MOSES (JUDE 1:9)
 - ELIJAH WAS CAUGHT-UP WITHOUT DYING (2 KINGS 2: 11)
 - BOTH APPEARED WITH JESUS ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION (MATT 17: 1-3)
 - BOTH HAD BEEN GIVEN POWER TO PERFORM MIRACLES (REV 11: 6)

- THE ANTICHRIST WILL KILL - THEM
- THEIR BODIES WILL BE PUT ON PUBLIS DISPLAY IN JERUSALEM (SODOM AND EGYPT - SIN)
- THE PEOPLE OF EARTH WILL REFUSE TO BURY THEM (GREAT DISHONOR) AND WILL CELEBRATE THEIR DEATH
- BUT GOD RAISES THEM FROM THE DEAD AND MORE JEWS ARE SAVED

THEIR DEATH IS THE END OF THE GREAT COMMISSION (LUKE 16: 31)

← MORE TO COME →

CH 12
THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON
—
ISRAEL AND SATAN

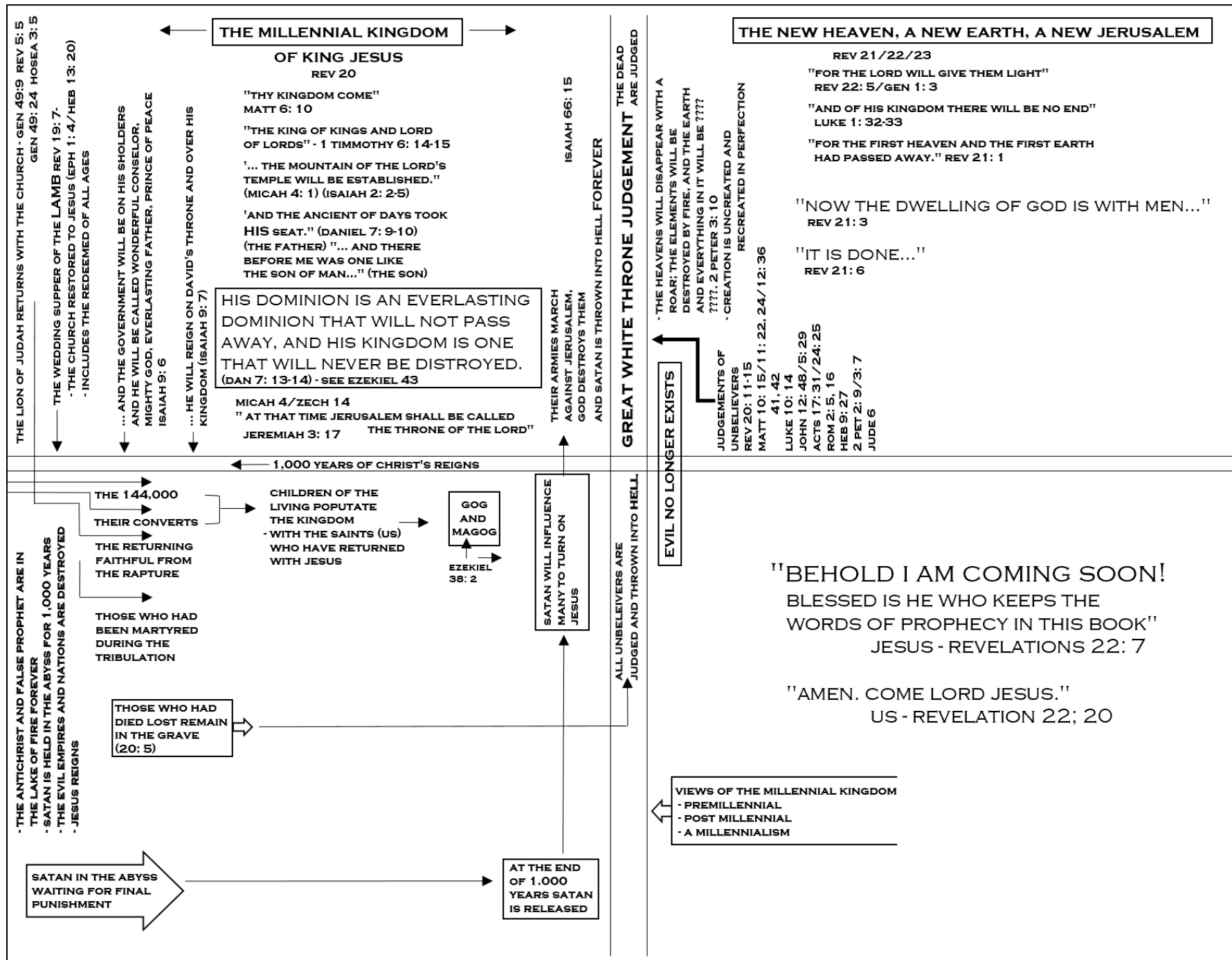
CH 13
THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA
—
THE ANTICHRIST

CH 14
JESUS AND THE 144,000 PLUS THE GOSPEL GIVEN BY ANGELS

CH 15
INTRODUCTION TO THE BOWLS FROM THE 4

CHAPTERS 17-18
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ANTICHRIST

CH 19
THE SECOND COMING



THE CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION (LISTING THE FIRST VERSE WHERE THEY ARE CITED)

1: 1	- GOD THE FATHER
1: 1	- JESUS CHRIST -
1: 1	- HIS ANGEL
1: 1	- THE APOSTLE JOHN -
1: 4	- GOD THE FATHER -
1: 4	- THE SEVEN SPIRITS -
1: 16	- THE SEVEN STARS -
2: 1	- THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS
2: 6	- THE NICOLAITAN-
2: 7	- THE SPIRIT
2: 8	- THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA
2: 10	- SATAN - THE DEVIL -
2: 12	- THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF PERGAMUM
2: 13	- ANTIPAS -
2: 14	- BALAAM - BALAK -
2: 18	- THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA
2: 20	- THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL THE PROPHETESS -
3: 1	- THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SARDIS
3: 5	- HIS ANGELS
3: 7	- THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA
3: 9	- THOSE WHO ARE IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN
3: 14	- THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA
4: 4	- TWENTY FOUR ELDERS
4: 6	- FOUR LIVING CREATURES
4: 7	- LIVING CREATURE LIKE A LION
4: 7	- LIVING CREATURE LIKE AN OX
4: 7	- LIVING CREATURE WITH A FACE LIKE A MAN
4: 7	- LIVING CREATURE LIKE A FLYING EAGLE
5: 2	- A MIGHTY ANGEL
5: 11	- MANY ANGELS
5: 13	- EVERY CREATURE IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH AND UNDER THE EARTH AND ON THE SEA
6: 1	- A RIDER ON A WHITE HORSE WITH A BOW-BENT ON CONQUEST
6: 4	- A RIDER ON A FIERY RED ONE
6: 5	- A RIDER ON A BLACK HORSE
6: 8	- A RIDER ON A PALE HORSE
6: 9	- THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN SLAIN
6: 11	- FELLOW SERVANTS AND BROTHERS WHO WERE TO BE KILLED
6: 15	- THE KINGS OF THE EARTH, THE PRINCES, THE GENERALS, THE RICH, THE MIGHTY AND EVERY SLAVE AND EVERY FREE MAN
7: 1	- FOUR ANGELS
7: 2	- ANOTHER ANGEL
7: 3-4	- THE SERVANTS OF OUR GOD WHO WERE SEALED - 144,000 FROM ALL THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL
7: 9	- A GREAT MULTITUDE - WEARING WHITE ROBES

ISAIAH AND THE PROPHECIES OF CHRIST

7:14 BIRTH - MATTHEW 1: 23
8:14-15 A STONE OF STUMBLING - ROM 9: 33/ 1 PET 2: 8
8:17-18 HOPE IN THE SON OF GOD - HEB 2:13
9: 1-2 ARRIVAL IN ZEBULUN AND NAPHTALI - MATT 4:12-16
9: 6 BIRTH OF IMMANUEL - MATT 1: 23/LUKE 1: 31-33 - 2: 7-11
11:1 REVIVAL OF DAVID'S DYNASTY - MATT 1: 6/16/ACTS 13: 23/REV 5: 5 - 22:16
12: 3 THE WELL OF SALVATION - JOHN 4: 10;14
25: 8 SWALLOWING UP DEATH - 1 COR 15: 54
28:11 GIFT OF TONGUES - 1 COR 14: 21-22
28:16 INCARNATION OF CHRIST - MATT 21: 42
29:18/35: 5 HEALING DEAF AND BLIND - MATT 11: 5
40: 3-5 JOHN THE BAPTIST - MATT 3: 3/MARK 1: 3/LUKE 3: 4-6/JOHN 1: 23
42: 1-3 BAPTISM AND TRANSFIGURATION - MATT 3: 16-17/17: 5
42: 6 NEW COVENANT WITH THE CHURCH - HEB 8: 6,10-12
42: 7 HEALING THE BLIND - LIBERTY FOR CAPTIVES - MATT 11: 5/LUKE 4: 18/MATT 4: 16
50: 6 JESUS BEATEN AND SPAT ON - MATT 26: 67/27: 26; 30/MARK 14: 66, 15;19/LUKE 22: 63/JOHN 18: 22
50: 7 HEADED FOR JERUSALEM - LUKE 9: 51
53: 1 ISRAEL FAILED TO RECOGNIZE HIM - JOHN 12: 38
53: 4 HEALED SICK - BEARING THEIR SIN - MATT 8:16, 17
53: 7-8 PHILLIP IDENTIFIES HIM FROM THE PROPHECY - ACTS 8: 32-33
53: 7 JESUS REMAINED SILENT - MATT 26: 63/27: 12-14/MARK 14: 61-15: 5/LUKE 23: 9/JOHN 19: 9/1 PET 2: 23
53: 7 THE LAMB OF GOD - JOHN 1: 29/1 PET 1: 18/ REV 5: 6
53: 9 INNOCENT OF ALL CHARGES - 1 PET 2: 22
53: 11 CRUCIFIED BETWEEN TWO CRIMINALS - LUKE 22: 37
54: 13 JESUS SAW THOSE WHO CAME TO HIM - JOHN 6: 45
55: 3 RESURRECTION AND MILLENNIAL THRONE - ACTS 13: 34
61: 1-2 FIRST AND SECOND COMING FOR DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL - LUKE 4: 18-19
62: 11 CALL TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION - TRIUMPHAL ENTRY - MATT 21: 5

THE CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION (CONTINUED)

7: 1 1	- ALL THE ANGELS
8: 2	- SEVEN ANGELS
8: 3	- ANOTHER ANGEL
8: 3	- ALL THE SAINTS -
8: 13	- AN EAGLE
9: 3	- LOCUST - SCORPIONS - HORSES
9: 4	- PEOPLE WHO DID NOT HAVE THE SEAL OF GOD -
9: 1 1	- A KING - THE ANGEL OF THE ABYSS - ABADDON - APOLLYON
9: 13	- A VOICE COMING FROM THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR
9: 14	- FOUR ANGELS - BOUND AT THE GREAT RIVER - EUPHRATES
9: 16	- TWO HUNDRED MILLION TROOPS
9: 17	- HORSES AND RIDERS
9: 20	- THE REST OF MANKIND
10: 1	- ANOTHER MIGHTY ANGEL
10: 3	- THE SEVEN THUNDERS
10: 7	- HIS SERVANTS, THE PROPHETS
10: 1 1	- PEOPLES, NATIONS, LANGUAGES AND KINGS
11: 2	- THE GENTILES
11: 3	- THE TWO WITNESSES
11: 7	- THE BEAST FROM THE ABYSS - CITED 36 TIMES
11: 10	- THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH
11: 13	- SEVEN THOUSAND PEOPLE
11: 13	- THE SURVIVORS
12: 1	- A WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN
12: 3	- AN ENORMOUS RED DRAGON
12: 4	- A THIRD OF THE STARS
12: 5	- A SON, A MALE CHILD WHO WILL RULE ALL THE NATIONS
12: 7	- MICHAEL
12: 7	- HIS ANGELS
12: 7	- THE DRAGON AND HIS ANGELS
12: 9	- THE GREAT DRAGON - THE ANCIENT SERPENT - THE DEVIL - SATAN
12: 10	- THE ACCUSER OF OUR BROTHERS
12: 14	- A GREAT EAGLE
12: 14	- THE SERPENT
12: 16	- WATER LIKE A RIVER
12: 17	- THE REST OF HER OFFSPRING - WHO OBEY GOD'S COMMANDS
13: 1	- THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA
13: 3	- THE WHOLE WORLD
13: 7	- THE SAINTS
13: 7-8	- EVERY TRIBE, PEOPLE, LANGUAGE, NATION, ALL INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH
13: 1 1	- A BEAST COMING OUT OF THE EARTH - THE FALSE PROPHET
13: 16	- THOSE WHO RECEIVE A MARK ON THEIR RIGHT HAND OR FOREHEAD

THE CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION (CONTINUED)

- 13: 18 - MAN'S NUMBER
- 14: 2 - THE HARPIST PLAYING THEIR HARPS
- 14: 6 - ANOTHER ANGEL FLYING IN MID AIR
- 14: 8 - A SECOND ANGEL
- 14: 8 - BABYLON THE GREAT
- 14: 9 - A THIRD ANGEL
- 14: 14 - ONE LIKE THE SON OF MAN
- 14: 15 - ANOTHER ANGEL
- 14: 17 - ANOTHER ANGEL OUT OF THE TEMPLE
- 14: 18 - ANOTHER ANGEL IN CHARGE OF FIRE
- 14: 18 - CLUSTERS OF GRAPES
- 14: 20 - THEY WHO WERE TRAMPLED
- 15: 1 - SEVEN ANGELS
- 15: 2 - THOSE WHO HAD BEEN VICTORIOUS OVER THE BEAST
- 16: 1 - A LOUD VOICE FROM THE TEMPLE
- 16: 9 - THEY WHO REFUSED TO REPENT
- 16: 10 - MEN WHO GNAWED THEIR TONGUES
- 16: 12 - THE KINGS FROM THE EAST
- 16: 13 - THREE EVIL SPIRITS
- 16: 13 - THE TRINITY OF EVIL - THE DRAGON - THE BEAST - THE FALSE PROPHET
- 16: 14 - SPIRITS OF DEMONS
- 16: 14 - THE KINGS OF THE WHOLE WORLD
- 16: 17 - A LOUD VOICE "IT IS DONE"
- 16: 21 - MEN WHO CURSED GOD
- 17: 1 - THE GREAT PROSTITUTE
- 17: 2 - THE KINGS OF THE EARTH AND THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH
- 17: 3 - THE ANGEL AND THE SPIRIT
- 17: 3 - A WOMAN ON A SCARLET BEAST
- 17: 6 - THOSE WHO BORE TESTIMONY OF JESUS
- 17: 8 - THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH ASTONISHED BY THE BEAST
- 17: 10 - THE SEVEN KINGS - EMPIRES
- 17: 12 - TEN KINGS
- 17: 14 - HIS CALLED, CHOSEN AND FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS
- 17: 15 - PEOPLES, MULTITUDES, NATIONS AND LANGUAGES
- 18: 1 - ANOTHER ANGEL WITH GREAT AUTHORITY
- 18: 2 - DETESTABLE BIRD
- 18: 3 - THE KINGS AND MERCHANTS OF THE EARTH
- 18: 4 - ANOTHER VOICE FROM HEAVEN
- 18: 4 - MY PEOPLE
- 18: 11 - MERCHANTS OF THE EARTH
- 18: 13 - BODIES AND SOULS OF MEN
- 18: 17 - SEA CAPTAIN, ALL WHO TRAVEL BY SHIP, THE SAILORS, ALL WHO EARN A LIVING FROM THE SEA

THE CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION (CONTINUED)

18: 20	- SAINTS, APOSTLES AND PROPHETS
18:21	- A MIGHTY ANGEL WITH A BOULDER
18: 22	- HARPIST AND MUSICIANS, FLUTE PLAYERS AND TRUMPETERS
18: 22	- WORKMEN
18: 23	- BRIDEGROOM AND BRIDE
18: 23	- THE MERCHANTS - THE WORLD'S GREAT MEN
18: 24	- PROPHETS AND SAINTS AND ALL WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED
19: 1	- A GREAT MULTITUDE IN HEAVEN
19: 2	- HE
19: 2	- HIS SERVANTS
19: 5	- A VOICE FROM THE THRONE
19: 5	- YOU HIS SERVANTS, YOU WHO FEAR HIM, BOTH SMALL AND GREAT!
19: 6	- A GREAT MULTITUDE LIKE RUSHING WATER
19: 7	- HIS BRIDE
19: 9	- THOSE INVITED TO THE WEDDING SUPPER
19: 10	- A FELLOW SERVANT WITH YOU AND YOUR BROTHERS
19: 11	- A RIDER FAITHFUL AND TRUE
19: 14	- THE ARMIES OF HEAVEN
19:17	- AN ANGEL STANDING IN THE SUN
19: 17	- THE BIRDS FLYING IN MID AIR
19: 18	- THE FLESH OF KINGS, GENERALS AND MIGHTY MEN - HORSES, RIDERS, ALL PEOPLE FREE AND SLAVE, SMALL AND GREAT
19: 19	- THE BEAST, KINGS OF THE EARTH, THEIR ARMIES - THE FALSE PROPHET
19: 21	- THE REST OF THEM
20: 1	- AN ANGEL HAVING THE KEYS
20: 4	- THOSE WHO HAD BEEN GIVEN AUTHORITY TO JUDGE
20: 4	- THE SOULS OF THOSE WHO HAD BEEN BEHEADED
20: 5	- THE REST OF THE DEAD
20: 6	- THOSE WHO HAVE PART IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION
20: 6	- PRIEST OF GOD AND OF CHRIST
20: 7	- THE NATIONS IN THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH - GOG NAD MAGOG
20: 9	- THE CAMP OF GOD'S PEOPLE
20: 11	- HIM WHO IS SEATED ON THE WHITE THRONE
20: 12	- THE DEAD GREAT AND SMALL
21: 2	- A BRIDE
21: 2	- HER HUSBAND
21: 3	- A LOUD VOICE FROM THE THRONE
21: 3	- MEN - THEM - HIS PEOPLE
21: 6	- HIM WHO IS THIRSTY
21: 7	- HE WHO OVERCOMES
21: 7	- HE WILL BE MY SON
21: 8	- THE COWARDLY, THE UNBELIEVING...
21: 9	- ONE OF THE SEVEN ANGELS

THE CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION (CONTINUED)

- 21: 9 - THE BRIDE - THE WIFE OF THE LAMB
- 21: 12 - TWELVE ANGELS
- 21: 12 - THE TWELVE TRIBES
- 21: 14 - THE TWELVE APOSTLES
- 21: 15 - THE ANGEL WHO TALKED TO ME
- 21: 24 - THE NATIONS WHO WALK BY HIS LIGHT
- 21: 24 - THE KINGS OF THE EARTH WHO BRING THEIR SPLENDER
- 21: 27 - THOSE WHOSE NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN THE LAMBS BOOK OF LIFE
- 22: 6 - THE SPIRITS OF THE PROPHETS
- 22: 9 - ALL WHO KEEP THE WORDS OF THIS BOOK
- 22: 11 - HIM WHO DOES WRONG/HIM WHO DOES RIGHT
- 22: 12 - EVERYONE ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE
- 22: 14 - THOSE WHO WASH THEIR ROBES
- 22: 15 - OUTSIDERS ARE THE DOGS
- 22: 16 - MY ANGEL TO GIVE YOU
- 22: 17 - THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY COME!
- 22: 17 - HIM WHO HEARS
- 22: 17 - WHOEVER IS THIRSTY
- 22: 17 - WHOEVER WISHES FOR THE WATER OF LIFE
- 22: 18 - EVERYONE WHO HEARS THE WORDS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK
- 22: 19 - ADDS TO OR TAKES AWAY
- 22: 20 - HE WHO TESTIFIES
- 22: 23 - GOD'S PEOPLE

THE SEVEN BLESSINGS OF REVELATIONS

- 1- WHO HEARS AND READS THE WORDS OF THIS PROPHECY AND KEEPS THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE WRITTEN (1: 3)
- 2- BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD (14: 13)
- 3- WHO WATCHES AND KEEPS HIS GARMENTS (16: 15)
- 4- CALLED TO THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB (19: 9)
- 5- PART OF THE FIRST RESSURECTION (20: 6)
- 6- WHO KEEPS THE WORDS OF THE PROPHECY OF THIS BOOK (22: 7)
- 7- WHO DO HIS COMMANDS (22: 14)

THE DESCRIPTION OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

A BOOK BY HIM AND ABOUT HIM. A BOOK THAT REVEALS HIM AND HIS ETERNAL PLAN

- 1: 4 "... FROM HIM WHO IS AND WHO WAS AND IS TO COME..." (GOD THE FATHER)
1: 5 "... THE FAITHFUL WITNESS..."
"... THE FIRST-BORN FROM THE DEAD..."
"... THE RULER OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH."
"... WHO LOVES US AND HAS FREED US FROM OUR SINS BY HIS BLOOD."
1: 7 "... TO HIM BE GLORY AND POWER FOR EVER AND EVER."
"... HE IS COMING IN THE CLOUDS..."
1: 8 " I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA... WHO IS, AND WHO WAS, AND WHO IS TO COME. THE ALMIGHTY."
1: 13 "... LIKE A SON OF MAN, DRESSED IN A ROBE REACHING DOWN TO HIS FEET, AND WITH A GOLDEN SASH AROUND HIS CHEST."
1: 14 " HIS HEAD AND HAIR WAS LIKE WOOL, AS WHITE AS SNOW, AND HIS EYES WERE LIKE BLAZING FIRE."
1: 15 " HIS FEET WERE LIKE BRONZE GLOWING IN A FURNACE, AND HIS VOICE WAS LIKE THE SOUND OF RUSHING WATERS."
1: 16 " IN HIS RIGHT HAND HE HELD SEVEN STARS, AND OUT OF HIS MOUTH CAME A SHARP DOUBLE EDGED SWORD."
" HIS FACE WAS LIKE THE SUN SHINING IN ALL ITS BRILLANCE."
1: 17 " I AM THE FIRST AND THE LAST."
1: 18 " I AM THE LIVING ONE; I WAS DEAD, AND BEHOLD I AM ALIVE FOR EVER AND EVER."
2: 1 - HIM WHO HOLDS THE SEVEN STARS IN HIS RIGHT HAND AND WALKS AMONG THE SEVEN GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS
2: 8 - HIM WHO IS THE FIRST AND THE LAST, WHO DIED AND CAME TO LIFE AGAIN
2: 12 - HIM WHO HAS THE SHARP DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD
2: 18 - THE SON OF GOD, WHOSE EYES ARE LIKE BLAZING FIRE AND WHOSE FEET ARE LIKE BURNISHED BRONZE
2: 23 - HE WHO SEARCHES HEARTS AND MINDS
2: 28 - THE MORNING STAR
3: 1 - HIM WHO HOLDS THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF GOD AND THE SEVEN STARS
3: 3 - LIKE A THIEF
3: 7 - HIM WHO IS HOLY AND TRUE, WHO HOLDS THE KEY OF DAVID, WHAT HE OPENS NO ONE CAN SHUT, AND WHAT HE SHUTS NO ONE CAN OPEN
3: 14 - THE AMEN, THE FAITHFUL AND TRUE WITNESS, THE RULER OF GOD'S CREATION
3: 20 - I AM
4: 2 - THE ONE WHO SAT THERE HAD THE APPEARANCE OF JASPER AND CARNELIAN
5: 1 - HIM WHO SAT ON THE THRONE (GOD)
5: 5 - THE LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH, THE ROOT OF DAVID
5: 6 - A LAMB, LOOKING AS IF IT HAD BEEN SLAIN
5: 6 - HE HAD SEVEN HORNS AND SEVEN EYES
6: 16 - HIM WHO SITS ON THE THRONE AND FROM THE WRATH OF THE LAMB!
10: 6 - HIM WHO LIVES FOR EVER AND EVER, WHO CREATED THE HEAVENS AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, THE EARTH AND ALL THAT IS IN IT,
AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN IT.
11: 17 - THE ONE WHO IS AND WHO WAS
13: 8 - THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD
14: 7 - HIM WHO MADE THE HEAVENS, THE EARTH, THE SEA AND THE SPRINGS OF WATER
15: 4 FOR YOU ALONE ARE HOLY
15: 6 WHO LIVES FOR EVER AND EVER
16: 5 YOU WHO ARE AND WHO WERE, THE HOLY ONE
16: 7 TRUE AND JUST

THE DESCRIPTION OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATIONS (CONTINUED)

16: 15 I COME LIKE A THIEF
17: 14 LORD OF LORDS AND KING OF KINGS
19: 10 THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY
19: 11 A RIDER - FAITHFUL AND TRUE
19: 11 HE JUDGES AND MAKES WAR
19: 12 HIS EYES ARE LIKE BLAZING FIRE, AND ON HIS HEAD ARE MANY CROWNS
19: 12 A NAME WRITTEN ON HIM THAT NO ONE KNOWS BUT HIMSELF
19: 13 DRESSED IN A ROBE DIPPED IN BLOOD
19: 13 HIS NAME IS THE WORD OF GOD
19: 15 OUT OF HIS MOUTH COMES A SHARP SWORD (JUDGEMENT)
19: 16 KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS
20: 11 HIM WHO IS SEATED ON THE WHITE THRONE
20: 12 EARTH AND SKY FLED FROM HIS PRESENCE
21: 2 HER HUSBAND
21: 5 WHO WAS SEATED ON THE THRONE
21: 6 THE ALPHA AND OMEGA - THE BEGINNING AND THE END
21: 22 IT'S TEMPLE
21: 23 IS ITS LAMP
22: 4 HIS FACE
22: 5 WHO WILL THEM LIGHT
22: 13 THE ALPHA, OMEGA, FIRST, LAST, BEGINNING, END
22: 16 THE ROOT, THE OFFSPRING OF DAVID AND THE BRIGHT MORNING STAR

LESSON #4

Revelation Overview:

The Book of Revelation is literally the revelation of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1). It is written by Jesus and about Jesus to provide His followers a view of the future. Its title in Greek (apokalupis) means an unveiling or disclosure. Literally, to "reveal" what God wants us to know about His future plans. The characters and events in the book of Revelation are real. They are not mythical or allegorical, and although symbolism is used, it is done so to highlight specific real characters or events. Symbolism is timeless. Through the centuries as languages and cultures change symbols do not. A horse is a horse and a beast is a beast, so when God used symbols to describe specific people, places or events He did so to enable different cultures, from different places and in different centuries to understand what He is saying from the same perspective. Everything in Revelation represented by a symbol is intended to highlight real people, real created beings, real places and real events that will occur just as the Bible says. Once you understand that simple premise the book of Revelation will immediately take on new meaning.

It is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing for those who read it. That's because no other book in the Bible will carry you through the entire story of Jesus like Revelation. From creation to re-creation we will learn things we can learn nowhere else and see Jesus in a way we've never seen Him before. During His Olivet Discourse Jesus revealed to His disciples future events that would bring about God's plan for the eventual destruction of evil and the creation of an eternal future reserved for those who have trusted their faith in Him. As we'll see, in addition to the prophets and John He also gave additional end-times insight to Peter and Paul. But it was to John that Christ chose to disclose the exact details of His plan. What He told him is astounding and in many ways frightening but He told His disciples not to worry because the events He foretold must take place before He will return. We must not worry either but seek to understand these events so we can gain a greater appreciation for the fulfillment of prophesy that is happening all around us. Fulfillment most Christians don't even recognize.

Revelation was written by the Apostle John (Matthew 10:2) around 95 AD during the latter years of the Roman emperor Domitian's reign (AD 81-96). This would be about 50-60 years after the ascension of Jesus to heaven and about 30 years after Paul's last ministry trip. At the time John was in his 90's and probably the last living Apostle. In many ways he was like a favored son - "...the one Jesus loved." (John 20:2). Believed to have originally been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-39) he may have been the youngest of the Apostles, who with his brother James were fishermen and amongst the first men called by Jesus (Mark 1:19-20). He, with James and Peter were also part of an "inner circle" who were closest to the Lord, who with the later addition of Paul, were privileged to see and hear things the others did not (Matthew 17:1 / 26:37 / Acts 10:9-16 / 2 Corinthians 12:2-4). For example, John was with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-2), and at one point wondered whether he and his brother could have seats of honor in Jesus' royal cabinet (Mark 10:35-41). He is the one who reclined on Jesus at the last supper (John 13:23), he was the only Apostle to accompany Jesus to the cross and was the one given the responsibility to care for Mary (John 19:26-27).

Unfortunately things didn't turn out quite the way John probably thought they would. He had written two epistles and one gospel that became part of the New Testament, and according to early

church history he was one of the early pastors to the church in Ephesus, but now his life was punctuated by bitter persecution "...because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 1:9). In other words, as a result of preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus John was (according to early church history) boiled in oil and exiled to the island of Patmos; a desolate rock in the Aegean Sea. One of about 50 small islands used by the Romans as a penal colony where prisoners lived in caves and quarried rocks under the whip until they died. It was here that John would spend his elderly years until, according to Eusebius "The Father of Church History", John was released by the emperor Nerva around 96-98 AD.

Before we move forward let's focus on this fact for just a minute. John, a faithful follower of Jesus. The one Jesus loved and a member of His inner circle was selected by God to document the future vision of Christ's return, the destruction of all evil and the creation of His new eternal kingdom. Wouldn't it make sense that a man with this level of faith and obedience, who was chosen for such a critical task would be given everything needed to write Revelation? Maybe a house on the coast, with a fine desk, lots of pens and paper and separated from persecution? Instead, Jesus sent him to an island prison to live in a cave, break rocks and possibly die of exposure, starvation or beatings. It was to Patmos Jesus sent John to write His most prophetic book. So think of this...what is your Patmos? Where has Jesus sent you to overcome and do His will? Maybe it's a place or maybe a situation you find yourself in, but either way, God may put us on our own Patmos and expect us to still fulfill His will.

Revelation was written about events of the future and to a large extent was written for and about Israel. But it was also written to the church; specifically to seven churches (Lampstands) and given to seven preachers of these churches (Stars) (Revelation 1:11-20). These were seven real churches in Asia Minor - modern day Turkey - who represent the character of all churches throughout time. As we will see, two of the churches are faithful and true, but the other five are disobedient to various degrees. Even to the point that one church is totally devoid of believers, with Jesus on the outside knocking at their door. It is to Israel, through these churches, and by extension to us that Jesus reveals His plan for the future and man's role in His coming blessing or coming judgment.

To whet our appetite for what is to come let's take a quick look at what we are about to study:

Chapter 1

Revelation begins with Christ's assessment of His church and a command for John to write down the vision he is given. Here we also see - like nowhere else in the Bible - a description of the glorified character of Christ. In doing so we will see an image of Jesus we have never seen before. An image so terrifying to John that he "...fell at His feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17). In fact, as we go through Revelation, we will discuss over 60 descriptions of Jesus and through each one we'll build an amazing image of who He really is.

Chapters 2 and 3

These are the actual letters written to the seven churches. We will study each of them in detail to identify where they were obedient and disobedient so that we can learn from their ways. This will in-turn give us a view of the modern church today. A view you may have never had before. Believe me, it is a real eye opener.

Chapter 4

Here we lose visibility to the church. Probably because it has been Raptured by this point. John gets his first view through the door of heaven to wonders we cannot fathom. Much of what he describes is difficult to get our minds around but that's the point. As beautiful as God's creation is on earth it has sadly been tarnished by sin. What John sees is God's untarnished creation and its perfect inhabitants. All focused on worshiping the Almighty God and obediently doing His will.

Chapter 5

Here we will begin to study the unveiling of God's plan; and more specifically His series of judgments. We're now introduced to the scroll. An item we will see over the next several chapters. In its most basic sense you can view the scroll as God's deed to creation, and more specifically as a renovation plan for the destruction of the old and recreation of the new. We will also see the Lamb, our Lord, who is the only one capable of opening the deed and implementing His plan.

Chapter 6

The scroll has seven Seals and as they are opened by Jesus they reveal a complex and systematic plan for the final judgments upon earth and its inhabitants -- the period called "The Tribulation", the "Seventieth Week of Daniel", or "The Time of Jacobs Troubles". A seven-year period when God's judgment is brought upon the unrepentant and the cursed creation.

These judgments are represented by:

- Seven "Seals" - a revelation of God's plan to bring an end to all evil. It is within the first four seals we will see the rise of the antichrist and an increasing series of events bringing on spiritual deception, political conquest, war, pestilence and destruction. In Mark 13 this is what Jesus called the beginning of birth pangs.
- Seven "Trumpets" - blasts of judgments upon evil
- Seven "Bowls" - the final rapid fire and horrendous judgments of God that is poured out upon all creation.

Don't be confused by these. We will study each one and as we do you'll begin to see the pattern in God's plan that exposes satan in his most evil state and the consequences Jesus brings on him and anyone who follows him.

Chapter 7

But as we've seen throughout the Bible, Jesus will always have a remnant - a witness for Him - and we see that in Revelation like never before. Astoundingly, even as Jesus brings destruction upon a sinful creation He also offers grace, and prior to the destructive seventh seal He will send 144,000 Jewish converts throughout the earth to preach the gospel. In doing so He gives even the most disobedient people during the Tribulation another opportunity to accept Him. In this chapter we will also see the "...great multitude...wearing white robes...", praising the Lord for His grace. These are those saved during the Tribulation by the witness of the 144,000 appointed evangelists.

Chapters 8-10

Chapter 8 brings us to the seventh Seal that when opened brings cataclysmic destruction upon all creation. Seven Trumpet blasts of destruction, and then within the seventh Trumpet comes seven Bowls when God's wrath is poured out upon the earth and its lost inhabitants. This will bring

destructive power like nothing we can even imagine as God wipes the slate clean and begins the early phase of rebuilding His kingdom.

Chapter 11

But always the provider of grace, even during this period, Jesus provides two more witnesses (possibly Moses and Elijah) who will spend a portion of the Tribulation preaching the gospel. This is the last half of the seventh week, also spoken of as 1,260 days or 42 months. They will be killed by the antichrist but then resurrected from the dead for all the world to see. It is at that time that the seventh Trumpet is sounded.

Chapters 12-18

These are some of the most confusing chapters in the Bible but we will spend a lot of time studying each one. Here we will see evil unleashed like never before as satan (the dragon), the antichrist (the beast), his false-prophet (the beast out of the earth) and their combined satanic system, as they collectively attack Israel. It is here we will see a level of satanic power and worship that is unprecedented, as "Mystery Babylon" becomes a world-wide demonic religion practiced by the people of "Babylon the great", the empire of the antichrist. But in chapter 16 we will see the seven Bowls of final judgment that will be poured out upon all evil creation. That creation will be characterized by three people groups; the "Kings", the "Merchants", and the "Sea Captains". Their actions illustrate the self-centered, materialistic "religion" of mankind during the Tribulation. It is also here that we see a character of Jesus we do not normally think about --- the Warrior King Israel expected at His first advent.

Chapter 19

This is explained in chapter 19 when Jesus returns as a Warrior King with eyes like fire and "...with justice He judges and wages war" - war like no one could even imagine. This is the Second-Coming. The glorious return of Jesus to defeat all disobedience and begin the process of restoration. This is not the Rapture - which will have already occurred by this point - This is the end of the Great Tribulation when Jesus returns (with us) for His final judgment of earth.

Chapter 20

And what a glorious return that will be. Once He completes His destructive judgments Jesus will establish His 1,000 year reign on earth -- His "Millennial Reign". The antichrist and his false-prophet will be thrown into hell - "...the lake of burning sulfur...". satan himself will be chained in the Abyss (a holding place, but not yet hell), to be released in 1,000 years for his own final destruction. In chapter 20 we will also see the Great White Throne Judgment where at the end of the 1,000 year reign Jesus will judge all mankind who did not accept Him as their Lord.

Chapters 21-22

Glory, glory, glory. For a believer these are the most encouraging chapters in the Bible. It is here that Christ will reign forever in a New Heaven, a New Earth and a New Jerusalem. It is here we will sing Hallelujah to our King. It is then that Eden will be restored, and when we as God's children will live with Him for eternity.

LESSON #5

Chapter 1, verses 1-2

For the most part our journey will be verse by verse, just as God wrote it. The study of Revelation is foundational and sets the stage for a greater understanding of God's word in general and of Jesus specifically. So we won't rush our study but will spend as much time as necessary to learn all we can.

Revelation, Chapter 1, verses 1-2

1. "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show His servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, 2. who testifies to everything he saw -- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (NIV)

1.a. - "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him...

The Book of Revelation, named after the Greek word for "apocalypse" is the unveiling and disclosure (revealing) of future events given to Jesus by God the Father. Although Revelation highlights events yet to come it is in reality a revealing of Jesus in all His glory through His End-Times actions. This revealing was anticipated by Paul who to the church at Corinth wrote - "Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." (1 Corinthians 1:7), and to the believers at Thessalonica he said - "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels." (2 Thessalonians 1:7). Likewise, Peter, inspired by the Lord wrote - "These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith...may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:7).

Long before this revealing God had already provided insight into the events and characters in Revelation through over 900 prophecies in the Old Testament. But now, in His revelation of End-Times events God wraps all of those together and places them in a chronological sequence. In doing so we see a picture of Jesus we've never seen before. That's because during His earthly ministry Jesus temporarily set aside His own will to become the Son of Man. Paul reminds us that Jesus "...being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God [the Father] something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant..." (Philippians 2:6-7). This doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't still "all God" (John 1:1-2) when He became "all man", but that He as God "...became flesh and made His dwelling among us.", in order to become as a man (John 1:14). He did this so that His earthly presence not only provided God's grace through His atoning sacrifice, but also so that He would be relevant to us - visible - humble - approachable - relational - a God we can relate to because He physically dwelt with us and because He knows our suffering and temptations first hand - "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) - This is why Jesus set-aside His will to the Father, in heaven; who was in full control of their overall plan, - "For I did not speak of my own accord but the Father who sent Me commanded Me what to say and how to say it." (John 12:49) --- "...but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what the Father has commanded Me." (John 14:31). This is also a model for us to follow. That as a believer and a follower of Christ we are seeking diligently to fulfill the will of the Father.

But now in Revelation we will see another layer of the character of Jesus. We will see the fully transformed Jesus, who has long-since gone to Calvary, atoned man's sin and rose victorious. The character of Jesus we see now is our Lord prepared for His victorious return when He will be the Warrior King originally sought-after by Israel who will come and destroy all evil, sin and temptation, and...all who create or do evil. This is the same Jesus, but in this role He reveals a side of His character - the Divine Judge - we have not seen as clearly as we do now. Certainly in the Old Testament we see the Lord as a Judge - the Genesis curse, the flood, exile in Egypt, wandering in the wilderness, the exiles in Assyria and Babylon, the silent period and many more. But now we see Jesus in His role as the Warrior King who comes to exact final judgment. And this time it's not just judgment on sin and sinful people, but now he is exacting a completely devastating and ultimate total destructive judgment on the source of sin - satan and his demonic puppets.

1.b. - "...to show His servants..."

The servants are us, believers in Christ, the sheep of His flock and the church as His bride. Even prior to the book of Revelation, God had already shown us what must take place through the prophetic clues in the Old Testament. Some of these are obscure and require deep study to make the connection, but others are clear-cut and relate directly to specific events and people. Recall in Matthew 24:15 Jesus told His disciples that the things He was telling them were already "...spoken of through the prophet Daniel..." -- and that this should "...let the reader understand...". We also know that Daniel was studying "...the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet." (Daniel 9:2). The difference in the book of Revelation is God is now tying these prophecies together to give us a better understanding of what to expect so that we can "...keep watch, because you do not know the day your Lord will come." (Matthew 24:42).

1.c. - what must soon take place."

God is very clear that these events will happen. It's not that they may happen or could happen -- instead, they "must" happen. God's plan for the destruction of sin began in Genesis 3:15 and follows a plan established in Christ who was -- "...chosen before the creation of the world, but as revealed in these last times for your sake." (1 Peter 1:20). As we've discussed, our generation has probably seen more End-Times prophecy fulfilled than any other. Clearly, Jesus will return to Israel - not Palestine, not a barren wasteland, but to an established and prosperous Jewish state. That was not possible between AD70 and 1948 when Israel was re-established as the "Land". This is directly related to numerous Old Testament prophecies which speak to the gathering of Israel. Even more indicational is the recent recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the Golan Heights as a part of Israel. All of this clearly supports events prophesied in the Old Testament and brought to full future fruition in the book of Revelation.

1.c. - "He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John.", 2. who testifies to everything he saw -- that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ."

We'll study more about John starting in verse 9, but for now suffice to say God selected "...the one Jesus loved." (John 20:2) to carry this message to the world. In doing so he "...testifies to everything he saw...", which God boils down to "...the word of God..." and "...the testimony of Jesus." John 1:1 tells us that Jesus is The Word and that from Genesis to Revelation the word is about Him (Luke 24:27). John had already written three books of the Bible, including one of the gospels. But now as he writes what he sees it will reveal to us a Jesus never seen before. That's why this is so exciting!

LESSON 6

Revelation, Chapter 1 verse 3

Our discussion of verses 1 and 2 helped set the stage for the Book of Revelation. Not only its unveiling of God's future actions to re-take His creation, but also as a revealing of Jesus like we have never seen Him before.

Now in verse 3 we find something we see nowhere else in the Bible -- a blessing for those who read, hear and do the words of God... - "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." - Jesus had already promised - "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:28), but now He expands on that blessing and applies it specifically to Revelation; not only to hearing but also to reading and doing. I also like to think that references like this to God's "word" is also a pointer to the true Word; Jesus - "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.", and, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." (John 1:1 and 14). This is a reminder that as we work our way through Revelation we will seek and find the blessing that comes from a more complete and glorious understanding of our King.

There are many blessings in Revelation, including Verse 1:3 plus...

- 14:13 - "Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.".
- 16:15 - "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.".
- 19:9 - "Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God.".
- 20:6 - "Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.".
- 22:7 - "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.".
- 22:14 - "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.".

Each of these are wonderful promises for those who are faithful to the Lord, but arguably the most important -- at least from the perspective of our Revelation study -- is the promise in verse 3. Tragically most Christians and even pastors will never receive this wonderful blessing because they won't take the time required to fully appreciate the gift of studying Revelation. But as Jesus told His apostles, and by association tells us, He wants us to understand this book (Mark 13:14 and 28), which is exactly why we are going to take the time to seek God's promise. In doing so I know we will be blessed as we read, hear and take to heart His word.

So let's unpack verse 3:

3a. - "Blessed is the one..."

Let's discuss two key words here, "Blessed" and "one" in reverse order:

One -- So who is the "one" the Lord is talking about? It's us. It's anyone who seeks God through His word, but specifically through the Book of Revelation. Here Jesus gives us an inside look at the future actions He will take to rid His creation of evil. This is not intended to scare us but instead to inform and prepare us. He has given this insight to us, the "one", who diligently seeks Him through this scripture. But the full blessing is not for those who simply read it, or simply hear it, but to those who read it and hear it, and do it. The true blessing only comes when we do all three.

Blessed -- The word blessed, and its derivatives are used 67 times in the Bible. Obviously God loves to bless His obedient children and has done so many times, but in this case I believe there are several ways to view the Revelation blessing of verse 3:

- It blesses us through insight into future events so we can keep watch and be on our guard as Jesus commanded - "So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time." (Mark 13:23). This insight enables us to understand what will happen so we can be prepared. Particularly in light of current events and the geopolitical activities we see going on today.
- It blesses us with the knowledge that the "Church" will be gathered to Jesus and raptured before His final wrath upon creation. That's why we must urgently look for and pray for the day when we are... - "caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thess. 4:17)
- It blesses us through the knowledge and understanding that in the end Christ will prevail over all evil. -- "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride [the church] has made herself ready. (Revelation 19:6-7). This in turn releases our fears of the unknown future and allows us to accept what will happen as the divine and well-prepared plan of God., "...do not be alarmed, such things must happen, but then the end is still to come." (Mark 13:7 / Luke 21:9 / Matthew 24:6). This knowledge further enables us to "Therefore encourage each other with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
- It blesses us through our knowledge that Israel will be re-gathered and reconfirmed as God's nation - "I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land." (Ezekiel 34:13). As a result, we can look at the current events surrounding Israel through a lens of appreciation most of the world (including Christians) does not have. For example, before this study had you ever thought about the role of UN Resolution 181 and how it plays a key part in the preordained end-times plan of God? Or the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel? To most these seem like seemingly insignificant geopolitical moves that have resulted in so much international turmoil. But to us they are events we can recognize as the preparations of God He has so clearly given us through His word.
- It blesses us mightily by taking us through the Bible as no other book of the Bible does. This enables us to better understand the insights God gave to the Old Testament prophets -- "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets." (2 Peter 3:2). This makes us so much more aware of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, particularly the

continuous story about Jesus and the conflict between our King and Satan, and the enemy's eventual destruction (Genesis 3:15 / Revelation 20:10).

- It blesses us with a view of Jesus we may have never considered before. When His actions become those of the Warrior King, our great defender, the ultimate Judge, the destroyer of all evil, and the creator of our eternal home with Him. - "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14).

As we work our way through Revelation these blessings and many more will be made known to us. -- "Hallelujah! Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory!"

3b. - "...who reads aloud the words of this prophecy..."

When Jesus went to His hometown of Nazareth - "He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read."..."Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down." (Luke 4:16 and 20). It was customary for rabbis in the synagogue to stand as they read the scripture then to sit in a position of humility as they began to teach (Matthew 5:1 / 13:1-2). Standing while reading also shows respect for the word and allows the reader to proclaim the word before the people. Generations before when Israel found the Book of the Law that had been abandoned by the people and given it to King Josiah - "...He went up to the temple of the Lord with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets - all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing [aloud] all of the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord..." (2 Kings 23:2-3). Likewise, when Moses presented the commandments of God to the people he - "...stood between the Lord and you to declare to you the word of the Lord..." (Deuteronomy 5:5). Ezra also "...opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them, and as he opened it, the people all stood up." (Nehemiah 8:5). Later the Jewish Talmud, which provided both civil and ceremonial law, included instructions for reading the scriptures. Soferim 11:2 says - "A tone in which only one reads; he stands up, reads, and sits down, he stands up, reads and sits down, even seven times." As we discussed during our study of Mark, the Talmud which was a derivative of early rabbinical law, often provides legalistic regulations far beyond what the scripture required, but I provide it here as a reference to the Jewish custom of standing to read the words of God.

But there is also a practical application. The term "...reads aloud..." signifies more than simply reading. Reading "aloud" is a method of teaching; and standing while reading enabled the reader to be heard more clearly. That was important considering the fact it is estimated that less than 3% of the first-century population of Israel could read. This would then require someone to "...read aloud..." so that others would be able to hear it.

3c. - "...and blessed are those who hear it..."

The first two blessings of 1:3 require specific actions on our part -- "Blessed is the one who 'reads aloud' the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those 'who hear it...'. Reading aloud [teaching] is the first and hearing is the second. I believe "hearing" in this sense -- relative to teaching -- is more about "listening". You can hear something and get nothing out of it. In fact there are thousands of noises going into our ears every day that we pay no attention to, but those noises that enter and wrap themselves around our brain comes when we "listen", when we pay attention and when we are attentive and want to learn. God told Moses to - "...read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people - men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your

towns - so they can listen and learn...". (Deuteronomy 31:11-12). Notice he was to read to them (out loud) so they could hear, listen and learn.

3d. - "... and take to heart..."

And the final step of reading aloud (teaching) and hearing (listening and learning) is to "...take to heart..." (doing). Jesus commands us - "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (James 1:22). This is the third and most important part of the blessing -- doing what we hear that is read. And guess what? This brings us right back to the people at judgment in Matthew 7:21-23. They deceived themselves by "doing" but they didn't listen to what they should have done. Instead, they did what they thought should be done instead of being obedient to what God said should be done. Why? Because they didn't listen.

3e. - "... what is written in it..."

As we saw in Matthew 7:21-23, the people did things but not what was written by God in His word. In Deuteronomy 6 God tells us how to approach His written word:

- They should - "...be on your hearts." - Deeply seated in our spiritual thoughts, not as just a passing devotion.
- We should - "Impress them on your children..." - as we read aloud the scripture so they can hear and do.
- We must - "Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." - In other words, the scripture we read, hear and do should be a constant companion throughout our day. No matter where we are or what we're doing.
- This is only way we can truly do "...what is written in it...". That is also why we will study Revelation by reading, hearing, listening, learning and doing what it says.

3f. - "...because the time is near."

By now this should be pretty self-explanatory. Although believers have been looking for the imminent return of Christ ever since He ascended (Acts 1:11), it is not for us to know exactly when it will occur (Acts 1:7). That said, it is certainly closer than it has ever been and the signs of the time seem to indicate "...the time is near."

Although Revelation 1:3 provides a beautiful promised blessing, Revelation also provides a stern warning - "I warn everyone who hears the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll." (Revelation 22:18-19). This is a sobering promise of God's wrath upon those who preach heresy. But that is not us. We are sincerely seeking God through His word so we can understand what He tells us. We will not self-interpret His word but will use scripture to interpret scripture for us. And as we do I believe we will begin to see clearly how to recognize those who intend to discredit God's words through apostate teaching.

May we receive the blessing God promises us as we read, hear and take to heart.

LESSON 7

Revelation chapter 1, verses 4-7

For the most part Revelation focuses on the role of Israel in future events, but in chapters 1 through 3 Jesus speaks to His church. About 50 years prior to John recording these visions the city of Jerusalem, with its temple, and over 900 towns and villages in Israel had been totally destroyed (in AD 70). Hundred-of-thousands of Jews were either killed, sent to labor colonies or sentenced to death for Roman sport. Yet during the same period the early Christian church had been established with both Jewish and Gentile believers and began to spread throughout the Mediterranean states. As the gospel and the church expanded to new areas believers came under severe persecution. But even more troubling is the fact the church began to fall away almost as quickly as it was established. Some fell into sin -- in some cases great sin. Others tolerated sin or were influenced by false teaching. Still others lost their love for Jesus to the point they suffered spiritual death or in one case became nauseous to God. It was to these churches, faithful or failing that Jesus was speaking; and in doing so He spoke to all churches through all time --- including us. These are not symbolic churches. They were real churches, with real people; and as we will see through their obedience and disobedience they were just like churches today.

Verse 4 - It is to these churches that Revelation is written, and since the characteristics of those churches represent the gathering of believers through time it is written to us too. -- John begins by greeting the reader and reminds us that what we are about to hear comes from the trinity of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

4a "...from Him (the Father), who is (present), who was (past), and who is to come..." (future). This speaks to the eternal presence of God who has no beginning and no end.

4b "...and from the seven Spirits before the throne...". There are several views of what this means. Some believe this refers to the seven lamps (churches) before the throne. Others believe the lampstand with seven Bowls is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel brought to them "...by my Spirit." (Zechariah 4:2-6). But in 1:21 Jesus explains that the lampstands in Revelation 1:12 are the seven churches, but I don't believe these are the seven spirits. I believe the seven spirits refers to the Holy Spirit. Primarily because the term is listed here with the Father and Son as the source of the prophecy. The seven churches could not have been a source of these truths because as we will see later five of the seven churches were in unrepentant sin and had forsaken the truth. But there are other indications that this is the Holy Spirit:

- In 1:4 Jesus would not have said grace and peace "to" the seven churches if they were the same seven spirits the message came "from".
- In 4:5 we are told it is the Spirit "of" God (part of God).
- Verse 5:6 speaks of the seven Spirits as being sent out to all the earth. This indicates the role of the Holy Spirit who was sent by God after the ascension of Jesus as He "...comes on you..." and indwells each believer. (Acts 1:8 / 1 Corinthians 6:19 / Ephesians 3:16).
- He is described by Isaiah as the Spirit with seven characteristics: (1) being of the Lord, (2) wisdom, (3) understanding, (4) counsel, (5) might, (6) knowledge and (7) fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2).
- In another view there are seven ways in which the Spirit brings God to believers - (1) We are born in the Spirit (John 3:3-6), (2) We are indwelt by the Spirit (Romans 8:9), (3) We are

baptized in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), (4) We are filled with the Spirit (Luke 1:15 / Luke 4:1 / Acts 2:4), (5) We are illuminated by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13), (6) We walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:25), (7) We bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

- Another view could be the seven gifts given through the Spirit as (1) prophesy (proclaiming the gospel), (2) serving, (3) teaching, (4) encouragement, (5) giving, (6) leading, (7) showing mercy. (Romans 12:6-8)

But in either case, the seven Spirits of the Lord are perfect and complete. He is the one who teaches us and reminds us of "...everything I have said to you.", which would include the things being said here. (John 14:26).

5a "...and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth." - There may be more, but I've counted at least 61 different names or descriptions of Jesus in Revelation. Verse 4 provides three of them.

- He is the "...faithful witness...", who came to earth and "...made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness..." "...by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:7 and 8). Also as a witness He is the word that brings knowledge of God to every man (John 1:1-14). This knowledge is transferred to us as He testifies to the gospel and the glory of God (John 7:7 / 2 Timothy 6:13 / Revelation 3:14).
- He is the "...firstborn of the dead...". As we have discussed, believers in Christ will be caught-up with Jesus in the air prior to the start of His coming judgment (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Prior to that Jesus was resurrected first, and in doing so became "...the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep..." (1 Corinthians 15:20 / John 14:19). This is the starting point of what Revelation calls "...the first resurrection..." (Revelation 20:5:6), which started with Jesus and culminates in the glorious resurrection of believers, but do not confuse this with His "Second Coming" which occurs at the end of the Tribulation period (Revelation 19). It is also not the "Second Resurrection" which occurs after Millennium when Christ will announce His final sentencing on all non-believers. (Revelation 20:5-6 & 13 / Daniel 12:2 / John 5:29 / Acts 24:15 / 1 Corinthians 15:23 / 1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- He is "...the ruler of the kings of the earth." -- At the first coming of Jesus the rulers and kings of the earth did not bow to Him as their Lord. Even the leadership of His chosen people of Israel failed to recognize His sovereign power over them. But that will all change at His Second Coming when He will return with a name written on His robe and on His thigh "...King of Kings and Lord of Lords...". He will defeat "...the kings, generals and the mighty..." (Revelation 19:16-18 / 20:9). Then in His Millennial Kingdom every knee shall bow to His supreme Lordship (Isaiah 45:23 / Romans 14:11 / Philippians 2:10-11).

5b. "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood...". This is in essence the simple truth of the gospel. God, who loved us before we loved Him (1 John 4:19), sent His Son (John 3:16) to free us from the bondage of sin (Galatians 5:1) through His divine sacrifice (Matthew 26:27-28 / Colossians 1:20 / Ephesians 1:7).

6. "...and had made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father - to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." --- There is an amazing verse in 1 Peter that gives me so much hope - "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession that you may declare praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9). In Deuteronomy 7:6-8 God gives a similar promise to Israel, but here Peter

(in a time of great disobedience of Israel) is also speaking to all who believe in Jesus. Although Israel remains the chosen nation of God, it is now through the church that the Lord's message of salvation is taken to the world. It is us, who have come into the light through the saving grace of Christ (Acts 26:18 / Ephesians 5:8-9 / Colossians 1:13) that He makes His royal priests who will one day function in a leadership role in His Millennial Kingdom and then serve Him and reign with Him forever. (Revelation 20:4-6 / 5:10 / 22:3-5).

7. "Look, He is coming with the clouds, and "every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him", and all the people on the earth "will mourn because of Him. So shall it be! Amen". -- Here Jesus provides a precursor of what is yet to come. This expands on the prophecy He gave Daniel "In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [the Father] and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and people of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14 / 2 Samuel 7:13). On the day Jesus returns with intentional judgment there "...will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all of the peoples of the earth [those unraptured non-believers] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30). This will be punishment for both unrepentant Jews and Gentiles alike, and they will mourn because "On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn Son." (Zechariah 12:9-10). This will result in the repentance of Israel as the survivors of God's wrath realize it was the Messiah they crucified. "Then they will know that I am the Lord their God..." (Ezekiel 39:28 / Acts 2:22 / Matthew 25:31). "They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him...". (Acts 7:52). Israel will return to God and finally recognize Jesus as their Lord. But until that day of recognition severe punishment will be poured upon the earth.

And with this Jesus has prepared John for a vision he had not expected. A vision of Christ we have not seen before.

LESSON 8

Revelation, chapter 1, verses 8-9

In the first seven verses of chapter 1 we see John being prepared for what he was about to see (V1-2). He is alerted to the fact blessings will be bestowed on all who read, hear and do what is in this prophecy (V3). He is then given insight that this revelation is meant not only for Israel, but also for the broader church of faithful believers (V4). He was told the message comes from the Trinity of God who brings credibility and power to what John will experience (V4-5). And lastly, and arguably the most important, is a short revelation of the gospel; simply summarized, and then followed by a reminder of the prophetic coming of Christ and His final judgment of all sources and doers of evil (V6-7).

Now in verse 8 we hear directly from God as He speaks to His church.

8. "I am the Alpha and Omega", says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." 9. "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus".

Verse 8

"I am the Alpha and Omega", says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." --- We now hear directly from our Lord as He begins His revelation narrative to John. In His introductory comments He leaves no doubt who He is -- the eternal, all knowing, Almighty, all Holy God. As the "Alpha and Omega" He is the first and last of all things - and as first and last He is all sovereign. This is symbolized by citing the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Just as with the English alphabet, whose letter combinations can be used to represent any place, person, thought or action, so it is with our Lord who is all knowing and the supreme ruler and creator of all things. "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead." (Colossians 1:17-18). He uses the term Alpha and Omega three times in Revelation 1:8, 21:6 and 22:13 to stress His total sovereignty because -- "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last; the Beginning and the End." -- He is the great I AM --- The "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14) --- of whom nothing comes before, nothing is over Him now and nothing will exist beyond Him - because He has no beginning and no end. He is also the Almighty God. "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? (Job 11:7). "I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces [not looking upon the face of the Lord], with two they covered their feet [in humility], and with two they were flying [in service to God]. And they were calling to one another" "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory." (Isaiah 6:1-3). The Almighty Holiness of God cannot be overstated. He is the God who set creation in place and has since the fall of man (Genesis 3:15), orchestrated events and actions to establish His chosen people, establish His believing church and bless or judge based on the actions of both. Now He reveals to us how He will recover His faithful, punish the unfaithful and impose final wrath and destruction on the source of all sin. This is a view of God --- and specifically Jesus --- we have not seen since the Noahadic judgment of man - a picture of the final destruction to

come. At that time He in a sense "raptured" His faithful through the protective ark, punished the unfaithful to death and "wreaked havoc" upon the entire earth. But...He did not destroy satan. he was intentionally left to exercise his powers but only within the limiting constraints imposed by God. For a time he will roam the earth like a lion to devour (1 Peter 5:8), he brings sickness and calamity, he tempts us with sin (James 1:14 / 1 Peter 4:12), and he blinds the unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4). So for now satan is here and is allowed to provoke sin and darkness. But in one sense it is that sin and darkness that so clearly highlights God's holiness and light. It is man's failure to understand sin that required the law to identify sin (Romans 7:7 and 11-12 / 8:1-4). This is a comparison like no other; a dichotomy of completely opposite views and actions. Yet we must remember, this is God's plan, and even though satan is the element that drives a separation between good and evil he will be destroyed. God in His sovereign power has been defeating satan at every turn. That's why there is no permanent sting in the death of believers (1 Corinthians 15:55-57), there is no temptation we cannot overcome (1 Corinthians 10:13), and there is no sin which can permanently impale the armor God gives us (Ephesians 6:12-17). he is being defeated at every turn. Most notably at the cross, and through that atonement he is defeated every time the gospel works to "...open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sin and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." (Acts 26:18).

And that is who is now speaking to John; the Father of Almighty Holiness, the Spirit of God's unlimited power, and the Son whose Holy and divine blood defeats the enemy with every forgiven sin and the justification of every lost soul. This is the God we now see. The God whose patience is gone, whose work of redemption is nearly done, and whose power of wrath will now be released upon all who reject His Son. As we will see in verses 12-20 this is a view of God we cannot overemphasize. A view that brought John to his knees and a view that will bring satan to his final, ultimate and permanent defeat. This is a view we must keep in the forefront of our minds as we work through the rest of Revelation.

So why is this so important? I believe the view most Christians have of Jesus is limited to the character we see in the New Testament -- the Son of Man who was humbly born, lived the life of a servant, was compassionate, healing, guiding, loving, patient and "...who so loved the world..." He was willing to shed His holy blood for His unholy creation. All of this is true and is a beautiful view of Jesus we must have. Yet we tend to forget another facet of the triune God represented in the Old Testament and manifest in Revelation. The God who cursed man, the enemy and the earth (Genesis 3:15), who destroyed all earthly beings except one remnant family (Genesis 6:6-13), who wandered Israel in the wilderness for 40 years, who exiled them in Babylon and Assyria (2 Chronicles 36:20 / 2 Kings 17:6-8), who destroyed their homeland in AD70 (Mark 13:2), and who exiled them to the four-corners of the earth until they are re-gathered and the "...fullness of the Gentiles has come in." (Luke 21:24 / Isaiah 11:12 / Jeremiah 31:10 / Ezekiel 39:27 / Romans 11:25 / Luke 21:24). He is still a God of deep, deep love, but He is also a God of judgment and wrath. I believe most Christians fail to see that because they do not study the Old Testament or Revelation, and therefore limit their view of God's complete character. A character we must understand to fully appreciate what "I AM" really means.

Verse 9

"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

John could have described himself in many ways: the "...disciple whom Jesus loved..." (John 13:23), an Apostle, one of the chosen 12, the only disciple who went with Jesus to the cross, and who was given care of the Lord's earthly mother (John 19:25-27). There were so many accolades he could have used. Instead, he presents himself as a "brother", a fellow believer, a "companion", a friend in a time when Christian fellowship was strained, who suffered with patient endurance. He was a persecuted man exiled to the Island of Patmos. A small rocky outcrop about 50 miles off the coast of modern Turkey. It was one of 50 small islands used by the Roman's for exiled death. Where prisoners would work in the quarries until they died. John was sent there for the crime of teaching of the word and sharing the testimony of Jesus. In other words he was persecuted for sharing the gospel in a Roman occupied land. According to early church tradition [not biblical - but from Tertullian 155-240AD], John was boiled in oil and then sent to the island prison by the emperor Domitian. This story is also recorded by John Foxe (1515-1587) in his famous "Book of Martyrs", who also states that John was released by emperor Nerva after which he returned to Ephesus. In either case, John was the last remaining Apostle who was sent to an Island prison in order to write the book of Revelation. I can't tell you how much this encourages me through my trials in life. Where is our Patmos? What is our Patmos? When will another Patmos occur? Where and when may we find ourselves on an Island in life where difficulties abound and persecution exists, yet our Lord expects us to accomplish the tasks He has assigned to us? Let us ponder that as we seek to understand the will of God in every facet of our lives.

LESSON 9

Revelation chapter 1, verses 10-20

It's obvious we're taking it slow going through chapter 1. That's because this chapter establishes fundamentals critical to our understanding of the rest of Revelation and where we will see a view of Jesus we rarely think about. This is Jesus in His holy, divine, all powerful role as the supreme Judge of all creation. This is critically important to understand because beginning in chapter 6 we will see satan and his entourage employ their most extreme powers of deceit and destruction as they make a last ditch effort to destroy Israel and lead the rest of the world to hell. Then from that point until the end of chapter 20 we see Christ systematically unleashing His power and destruction until all sources and doers of evil are gone. This is a conflict that began before time when satan was initially thrown from heaven for his desire to be like God. -- "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High (Isaiah 14:12-14). This was the desire of satan (as told through the example of the king of Babylon), and is the ambition that makes him the enemy of Christ. Yet, as we will see later in Revelation Jesus will be victorious. - "But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit." (Isaiah 14:15) -- "I saw satan fall like lightening from heaven." (Luke 10:18). -- "So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, among the fiery stones." (Ezekiel 28:12-16). -- "But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - the ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." (Revelation 12:8-9 / see also Isaiah 14:12-15). --- I give you this background on satan to help us understand why the view of Jesus as the divine Judge is so important for us to see. It is a glorious view of our Almighty Lord who now will conclude the conflict prophesied in Genesis 3:15 when God put enmity between Eve's Seed and satan. But there was also a promise in that verse. After centuries of satan-influenced disobedience by God's creation our Lord's patience will have worn thin and it will be time for His faithful followers to see the enemy crushed, evil destroyed and God's kingdom eternally restored.

Verse 10 - "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet."

10a "On the Lord's day..." --- It was Sunday, the first day of the week, observed by Christians as a day of worship to commemorate Christ's resurrection from the dead. - "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance." (John 20:1 / Acts 20:7 / 1 Corinthians 16:2).

10b -- "I was in the Spirit..." --- Clearly John was given more than just a vision by the Holy Spirit. Many times God gave His message to His Apostles and followers. Like He did with Peter and Paul (Acts 11:4-14 and 2 Corinthians 12:2-4). But the revelation given to John was not like a dream. It was actually happening and John was there as its witness. We also see this with Daniel, who was given an end-times revelation over 600 years before John. -- "...as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold." (Daniel 10:1-9). Interestingly, we will see in chapter 1 verse 17, both

Daniel and John had a similar reaction when face to face with their divine King. - "...and as I listened to Him I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground." (Daniel 10:9). Clearly, both men had been in the presence of the Lord.

But being "in the Spirit" is not unique to the Apostles or Prophets. Even though our daily walk may not be punctuated by divine visions of this type we are still able to:

- "...walk in the Spirit..." (Galatians 5:16)
- and show the "...fruit of the Spirit..." (Galatians 5:22-25)
- as we seek to "...abide in Him..." (1 John 2:6)
- as He gives us power (Romans 15:13 / Acts 1:8)
- and as He teaches us (John 14:26)
- because "...Christ lives in me...." (Galatians 2:20)
- through the Spirit who was sent to us by God (John 14:16-17)

Yet we must remember that "abiding" in the Spirit is an intentional action on our part. As believers in Christ, the Spirit lives in us (1 Corinthians 6:19), but it is up to us to accept His guidance and walk in obedience to His will (2 John 1:6). Don't expect God to reveal things to you the way He did John or Daniel, but you can rest assured that if you consciously seek to abide in God's will He will move in your heart in amazing ways. --- "I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:27).

10c -- "...and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet." --- John heard a voice "behind" him, indicating that Jesus appeared while John was looking the other way. I think of this sort of how the rapture of believers and the Second Coming of Christ the Judge will occur - His appearance will be sudden and unannounced, but once there His voice will be "loud" like a trumpet; clear and brilliant in its proclamation. --- "For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16). In the Bible a trumpet sound is often used for a gathering, an announcement, or a proclamation; like a call of soldiers to battle or for God's people to come to Him. --- "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast." (Exodus 19:16). "And in that day a trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.." (Isaiah 27:13). "Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their head." (Ezekiel 33:5). "And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds...". (Matthew 24:31). --- And this is what John heard; the commanding all-powerful voice of God.

Verse 11 - "...which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

11a - "Write on a scroll what you see..." -- Several times in Revelation John is commanded to write what he sees and hears. It is through this writing that God gives us His revelation of what is yet to come. A scroll was a long piece of "paper" that would later be rolled into a tube. It was the most common type of writing platform in John's day. Early "paper" (not yet a term in that age) was made of Papyrus, a type of plant material found only in Egypt. Later paper was often made from calfskin Vellum, or a lower quality Parchment that was also made of animal skins. By the

Middle Ages the use of skins for paper began to be replaced by a cloth-based product cut into sheets and bound in books. By the 19th century paper was made of plant-fiber like we use today.

11b - "...and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." --- The book of Revelation was written to all believers (1:3) but it came to us through seven churches in Asia Minor. Seven, being the number of completion, they represent the complete body of believers in Christ, which is the church (Colossians 1:18 / 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 / Ephesians 5:23). These are not symbolic churches. These are seven real churches in what is now modern day Turkey. They were seven churches in seven cities where the gospel had been preached. They were also on the ancient postal route through the region which was one of the ways the gospel was spread. The first church was in Ephesus, established by Paul under the leadership of Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18-20), and later the recipient of his Ephesian letter. The last on the route is Laodicea, which as we will see is also the last in their faith. Sadly only two of the seven churches are faithful. The other five (the majority) have issues ranging from distraction to total depravity. In fact, as we'll see in chapter 3 one of the churches is dead and another is nauseating to God.

There are generally two common ways of looking at these churches:

- (1) that they represent the rise and fall of spiritual character and faithfulness of believers during successive time periods over the centuries. With Ephesus being the early church of Acts and Laodicea being the disobedient church of the last days. Or,
- (2) (the view I believe) these seven churches represent the character of the church over all time. In other words, not in sequential phases, but at any given time during the "church age" you could find churches that fit each of these characteristics. I believe this view still applies today and as we go through a more in-depth study of each church over the next several weeks I believe you'll quickly be able to see where modern churches and denominations -- including Southside -- align with these seven models.

Verse 12 - "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands."

12a - "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me...". --- John now turns to face the voice he has heard. The voice of Jesus. But when he does his immediate attention was momentarily directed to seven lampstands.

12b - "...And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands." -- As we'll learn in 1:20 the lampstands represent the seven churches who represent the body of Christ. Just as seven lamps lit the interior of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:37), so too the seven churches are supposed to be a light to the world as they cast the light of Jesus (Matthew 5:14-16). - "A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:32) - as "...they preached the word wherever they went." (Acts 8:4). Here we see them with Jesus, golden and protected "...from the evil one..." (2 Thessalonians 3:3). They are golden because they are precious and valuable; refined in the crucible of faith to burn off the dross. (Zechariah 13:9 / Job 23:10 / Proverbs 17:3). But as we will see, their light can burn dim and even extinguished unless they focus on the Lord.

Verse 13 - "and among the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest."

13a -- "and among the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man...." -- What an encouraging verse! John now sees Jesus. Not "as" "the" Son of Man, but "like" "a" Son of Man. Here we see Jesus but not in His earthly manifestation. He is now in His all-holy and fully transformed person of God. The term Son of Man was used by Jesus over 80 times in the New Testament to describe Himself. It comes from Daniel 7:13 - "In my vision at night I looked and there before me was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven." - But what is so encouraging about this is the fact Jesus is "...among the lampstands...". Jesus is among His church, in His church, protecting His church! "For where two or three gather in My Name, there I am with them." (Matthew 18:20). Jesus is amongst His people, His followers, whom He prayed for in the garden so "...that they may be brought to complete unity." (John 17:23). It is so important to understand that in John's vision we see Jesus "among" His church as the head of the Body (Ephesians 1:22 / 5:23 / Colossians 1:18), guiding, nurturing, and as we will see...judging. He is always with us, even to the "...very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). Hallelujah!

13b - "...dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest." -- Here we begin to see a physical description of Jesus in His divine and holy presence. A view John had only momentarily seen on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17). He wears a robe going down to His feet similar to the robe of a Levitical priest (Leviticus 16:4); as the ultimate "...merciful and faithful high priest..." (Hebrews 2:17), with a golden sash across His chest similar to Jesus in the vision of Daniel - "...I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold." (Daniel 10:1-9). This is Jesus, "Righteousness will be His belt and faithfulness the sash around His waist." (Isaiah 11:5). This is the image of our all-holy King.

Verse 14 - "The hair on His head was white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire."

14a - "The hair on His head was white like wool, as white as snow..." -- This is a picture of holiness and purity; a dignified and glorious King. His hair was "...like wool...". The wool of the holy Lamb of God. Daniel made a similar observation in describing God the Father, the "Ancient of Days", whose hair was white like wool (Daniel 7:9). However in this case the description is clearly that of Jesus "...like a Son of Man...", and shows the equality of the Father and Son as one, and as two parts of the three person Trinity (John 17:21). The term "White as snow" describes fresh fallen snow on a field. Pure, white, unblemished and clean.

14b - "...and His eyes were like blazing fire." The eyes of God are all-seeing and in His role of Judge and His actions are all consuming because He can "see" into the very soul of man as He observes "...all the godlessness and wickedness of people..." (Romans 1:18). We see this manifest itself when Jesus speaks to the unfaithful church at Thyatira - "These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire..." (2:18). Then as the all-holy Destroyer of evil - "I saw heaven open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire..." (19:11-12). "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13). This is the Lord who appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3:2), who led Israel as the pillar of fire at night (Exodus 13:21), whose fire consumed the burnt offering (Leviticus 9:24), who will reveal the quality of man's faith in fire (1 Corinthians 3:13); the God who is "...our all-consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29). Hallelujah!

Verse 15 - "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters."

15a - "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace..." -- In the courtyard of the Tabernacle was the Altar of Burnt Offering, overlaid with bronze and with utensils of bronze (Exodus 27:1-8 / 38:1-5). It was here the offerings of Israel were made to the Lord for atonement of the people's sins (Leviticus 1:1-9). It was here that God consumed the offering as an aroma pleasing to Him. This atonement was a judgment. The people's actions were often sinful - just as with us - and their atonement to avoid eternal death was through an unblemished offering to God. Similarly, Christ, the Spotless Lamb, became an offering of atonement for our sin (Exodus 12:21-23 / Philippians 2:8). But in this end-times view of Christ final judgment will come. His church will be raptured and tribulation will begin. It is then that the feet of God, bronze like the altar will bring crushing judgment on all creation as God "...placed all things under His feet...", and makes "...your enemies a footstool for your feet." (Hebrews 1:13 / 10:13 / Psalms 110:1).

15b - "...and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters." - "His voice..." - O how I look forward to the day when I may audibly hear the voice of my Savior and King. I was with my Mom and Dad when each of them passed away, and although that moment was tough and heartbreaking, both times the same thought immediately ran through my mind -- they now know what the voice of Jesus sounds like. Maybe that's an odd way to think about death, but as a person with no doubt about the salvation of my parents it was a thought that gave me peace and hope. -- Here John hears the voice of Jesus in His divine state. A sound that must have been different than He sounded on earth. Now His voice is "...like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with His glory." (Ezekiel 43:2).

This is the voice of God. The same voice that said:

- "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3),
- "I am the way..." (John 14:6),
- "Come, follow me..." (Matthew 4:19),
- "...but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst." (John 4:14),
- "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:30),
- "My grace is sufficient..." (2 Corinthians 12:9),
- "It is finished." (John 19:30),
- "Look, I am coming soon." (Revelation 22:7). --- Oh how glorious it will be when we hear His voice and see His face. Taken together with His robe, sash, pure white hair, blazing eyes and bronze feet we now have a view of Jesus as the Judge of creation prepared to bring ultimate justice. It is a view unlike anything we have ever seen before.

Verse 16 - "In His right hand He held seven stars, and coming out of His mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

16a - "In His right hand He held seven stars..." - As we will see in verse 20 the seven "stars" are messengers of the seven churches. They were probably the pastors or leaders to whom John will give a letter to their church and the revelation of Jesus. Here Jesus holds them in reference to His control over His church.

16b - "...and coming out of His mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword." - There are several things to discuss here:

- "...coming out of His mouth." - Jesus is the word (John 1:1), and as such judges by His word.
- "There is a Judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day." (John 12:48). Jesus is the way (John 14:6) but He is also the truth; the truth of His words. "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword..." (Hebrews 4:12). The words of Jesus bring comfort and peace to those who believe in Him, but to those who reject they will bring judgment and death when "Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.", and
- "The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse..." (Revelation 19:15 and 21). What comes out of Jesus' mouth is not a physical sword, it is the almighty power of His word - the breath of God (2 Timothy 3:16). To those who accept His word there is salvation, but for those who reject His word it is death.

16c - "sharp" - His words are true and keen. There is no hesitation in His judgment. It is just, swift and cuts clean.

16d - "...double-edged sword..." - The image is that of a Roman short sword. First invented by the Spanish in the 3rd century BC, the "Gladius Hispaniensis" became the most common fighting implement of John's day. Early readers would have quickly recognized this as a weapon that can slash in either direction or could be used to plunge, thrust and stab straight in. But it is a short sword, just as time grows short for the unfaithful, and is always used from a short distance; eye to eye with the enemy in close combat.

16e - "His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." - When Peter, James and John went with Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration they saw Him transformed into His divine state - "There He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun..." (Matthew 17:2). Luke adds that "...the appearance of His face changed..." (Luke 9:29). This is a holy view of Jesus we will see later in Revelation when He truly becomes the light of the world when, - "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light." (Revelation 22:5).

17. "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead. Then He placed His right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid, I am the First and the Last.'"

17a - "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead." - What a shock John must have felt. He spent three years with Jesus as the Son of Man, but now he sees Him in His glorified state. His appearance is vastly different and as we have seen is also complex in its understanding. Like Daniel did in basically the same situation John faints from fear (Daniel 10:9).

17b - "Then He placed His right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid...' - The mighty right hand of God was placed on John just as it was on Israel "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with My mighty right hand." (Isaiah 41:10). The same hand that reached down to David "...from on high and took hold of me..." (Psalms 18:16), and settled him down when he said "I cling to you; your right hand upholds me." (Psalms 63:8). The mighty right hand of God represents His sovereign power over

all things. It is the power where we take refuge, it is what sustains us, it brings us victory, (Psalms 17:7 / 18:35 / 44:3). Jesus sits at the right hand of God (Hebrews 1:3 / Psalms 110:1) and when Stephen was stoned Jesus stood at the right hand of God. And finally, when the scroll of destruction is given to Jesus it will come from the right hand of God (Revelation 5:1). -- Just as Jesus did for John I am often encouraged and sustained when I read the words He said to Joshua "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9).

17c - "I am the First and the Last." -- As He did in verse 8 Jesus reminds John that He is all things - the Almighty. "I, the Lord - with the first of them and the last - I am He." (Isaiah 41:4). The I AM -- "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14).

Verse 18 - "I am the Living One, I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." --

18a - "I am the Living One, I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!" ---Here Jesus confirms His omnipotence as the only One who has lived through death, and through His resurrection will live eternal.

18b - "And I hold the keys of death and Hades." -- This reinforces the supreme authority of Christ "Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear [and believe] will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life to Himself. And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man." (John 5:25-27). "Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11). "Death and Hades" is basically the same thing and Jesus holds the "keys" (control) over both. Hades is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Shoel" which describes the place of the dead, but in reality it generally means a state of being dead. That said, Christians - whose soul already belongs to Jesus - will "sleep" in the sense that our earthly bodies are in the grave yet our soul goes to be with the Lord. Paul explained this to the church at Thessalonica - "For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him." (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Note that God will "bring" the believer's souls "with Jesus", which means they have been with Jesus in heaven and will return with Him at the Rapture. Further supporting this is the promise of Jesus to the redeemed thief on the cross "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise." (Luke 23:43), and the story of Lazarus the beggar who when "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side (in heaven) (Luke 16:22).

Verse 19 - "Write therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." -- The first command to write what he has already seen and what he has not yet been shown.

Verse 20 - "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels [Greek for messenger] of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." -- Here Jesus clarifies the identity of messengers and churches He mentioned earlier in Chapter 1.

LESSON 10

An Introduction to the Seven Churches of Revelation

Quick Recap of Chapter 1:

Chapter 1 grounded us in several fundamentals we'll need to help us understand the rest of the book.

These included:

- This book is not only a revelation of end-times events, but it is seen through the revealing actions of Jesus in His role as creation's ultimate Judge (V2).
- There is a promised blessing to everyone who reads, hears and does what is in the book. This makes it clear that our Lord expects us to study it and teach it so we can be aware of how it enriches our knowledge of Jesus and His word, and how it encourages us with a promised view of the future (V3).
- A future vision that is wholly credible and comes jointly from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (V7).
- But it focuses specifically on Jesus as He prepares for and executes His acts of final judgment (V4-5).
- We are reminded of God's saving grace that has been extended to all men by the eternal, all-holy and Almighty King of kings (V6-8).
- The Apostle John is given the revelation while suffering Roman persecution on the island of Patmos. This is a great encouragement because it helps us understand that in life we often find ourselves on a Patmos of our own, during which we must still endure to the glory of God (V9).
- John is commanded to write what He sees as a letter to seven churches. These are congregations of believers who characterize the faith of the church through time (V10-11).
- And finally we see Jesus like we've never seen Him before. As the most holy, most divine, all powerful Son of God. We see Him in all His wisdom and purity, as white and clean as new snow, with blazing eyes that will penetrate our very soul and with feet of bronze He will use to stamp judgment upon all of His unfaithful creation. Jesus is the Word (John 1:1), but in the book of Revelation He is the Judge who will use His word to destroy all who reject His word --- after centuries of freely offering grace He will destroy the rejectors with the very words they ignored – through the holy breath of God (2 Thessalonians 2:8 / Revelation 19:15).

Introduction to the Seven Churches:

Over the next several lessons we'll study each of the seven churches in detail, but first it's important to spend a little time talking about who they were, where they were and the culture they lived in. We'll also discuss how Jesus approached each church and how He structured His message. --- Combined, the seven churches represent Christ's entire "church"; the body of believers who through time were intended to be the hands, feet and voice of Jesus (Romans 10:14-15 / Matthew 28:19 / Acts 8:4). But why are there seven and why did Jesus write personal letters to them?

First, I think there may be seven because that's the number of completeness in the Bible. This indicates these churches represent the complete body of Christian believers through the centuries.

They're represented here as the seven lampstands because their task is to – "...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14 and 16). Simply put, the world should see the true light of Jesus through His church which makes them a powerful tool in His hands.

Secondly, the content of Revelation is generally focused on three audiences – Israel the church, and later, all combined believers. The first three chapters focus specifically on the Christian church. This includes Christian Jews but for the most part represents Gentile believers. Then starting in chapter 4 the focus shifts to the second audience, Israel, their future tribulations and their final opportunity for Messianic redemption. This continues until chapter 19 when Jesus returns, bringing with Him His raptured church, destroys all evil and establishes His Millennial Kingdom. The third audience starts in chapter 20 when Jesus completes His final judgment and creates a new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem so that all who believe – both Jews and Gentiles – will live together for eternity with God (Revelation 21:3-4). So given this division of content, the "church" represents a key audience of end-times events and is addressed first because we will be raptured at the beginning and will return with the Lord in the end.

The seven churches are not symbolic. They were real churches, with real members, in real cities that existed at the time of the Apostle John.

- Geographically they were all located in Asia Minor, which is now modern Turkey. They were strategically positioned along the ancient postal route starting with Ephesus on the east coast of the Aegean Sea, and then traveling north through Smyrna, to Pergamum, then southeast through Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and finally Laodicea. This route not only carried the public mail but also enabled the spread of the gospel as the message of Jesus was carried from town to town and church to church. This may explain why Paul's epistles were often written as letters. That way they could easily be forwarded along the postal route to be shared between these and other churches. Paul alludes to this when writing to the church at Colossae, located about ten miles southeast of Laodicea -- "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea." (Colossians 4:16).
- Politically they were located in territory occupied by the Roman empire and as such were subject to Roman rule and persecution. Some were under more strict Roman rule than others but all would have been subject to Roman policy and sometimes enforced religious beliefs.
- From a religious perspective the cities were all centers of pagan worship. Some followed Greek cults, some Roman, and some an odd mix of various belief systems. With the exception of a relatively small Jewish population, all were pagans, often with extremely demonic worship practices involving dark magic, extreme immorality, temple prostitutes and even self-mutilation. So much so that Pericles (a pagan himself) said Ephesus was so immoral they should all be drowned. Most people in the churches of Asia Minor were either Jewish or were gentiles who had come from a cult-based background, with the latter being accustomed to a life of open and often extreme sin. This culture would bear heavy influence on the church; sometimes as a source of persecution, but other times as a catalyst for tolerating or returning to sin. So much so that only two of the seven churches were found to be faithful. The others were in various stages of disobedience ranging from distraction to death. --- Just like the modern church today.

So what was the local culture?

In Biblical times modern Turkey was divided into two sections with many smaller territorial provinces --- Asia Minor (ancient Anatolia) in the east and Thrace in the west. All seven of the churches were located in the eastern section and in smaller districts such as Phrygia. The most ancient inhabitants of this area were cave dwellers who settled along the Gediz River, but by the Bronze Age the area was populated by remnants of numerous migratory people-groups. These included the Akkadians, Assyrians, Hittites, Aegean-European “Sea People”, Lydians, Phrygians, Medio-Persians, Seleucids, Ptolemaics, Pergamums, Gauls, Greeks and Romans. Needless to say, by the time the seven churches were founded the people of Asia Minor were a mixed-race of inhabitants with multicultural cult beliefs and a complex and confusing Greco-Roman system of pagan worship. This, plus an influx of Jews and their lesser influence, is the basis for the cultural and religious background from which the early Christian converts came.

To further understand the people and their mind-set let’s briefly review the history and socioeconomic makeup of each city and its population:

- Ephesus – By the time the Apostle John lived in Ephesus the city was over a thousand years old. It was one of twelve ancient cities of the Greek-Athenian empire called the Ionian League. With a population of over 225,000 it was the third most prominent city in the Roman empire; only behind Rome and Alexandria. Called the “Gateway to Asia”, Ephesus was a center of commerce. Located on the Cayster River with direct access to a magnificent bay on the Aegean Sea, it was a key maritime trading port, a commercial hub and a center for banking. The city was metropolitan and provided for every need and desire. It even had a theatre that held over 25,000 people. But in the ancient world it was best known as the center for cult-worship of the mythical Greek goddess Artemis, who was known to the Romans as Diana. In Greco-Roman legend she was one of the Twelve Olympians, the twin of Apollos and the daughter of Zeus. In the seventh century BC the Ephesians built an enormous temple for her worship. Called the Artemision it was 230 feet wide, 425 feet long and later considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The Artemis/Diana cult included the practice of dark magic and extremely immoral worship practices. It was here that a riot broke out when the Apostle Paul’s gospel message impacted the lucrative manufacturing business of idol making (Acts 19:23-41). Despite the power of this demonic influence Ephesus would produce a church with prominent pastors and dedicated members. The city fell into decline by the Middle Ages and by the year 1090 had become a small and insignificant town.
- Smyrna – traveling north we come to Smyrna, modern Izmir in Turkey. Located about 50 miles north of Ephesus on the River Hermus it is on the head of a deep-water port which made it a prominent trade city with roads reaching out across Anatolia. Founded by the Aeolians in the 11th century BC, it was later inhabited by Ionians, Leleges and Greeks before eventually becoming a territory of Rome. Its name means “myrrh” for the aromatic perfume manufactured there that was used to anoint dead bodies (John 19:39). Often called the Crown of Asia, it was considered one of the most beautiful cities in Asia Minor and was known as a center for science and medicine. Smyrna was extremely loyal to Rome and as a result developed a religious cult-following of emperor worship in which the ruler was viewed as a god. Yet, it had a sizeable Jewish population which became part of the Christian church when it was established in the first century. Polycarp (69-155AD), an early leader of the church of Smyrna, who according to early church history may have actually have been led to the Lord under the ministry of John, was in his 80’s when burned at the stake for refusing to deny Christ.

He became one of the first of over five million Christians believed to have been executed by the Romans. Over the centuries the city was overrun by multiple armies and in 1402 its population was largely massacred during the Mongol conquest.

- Pergamum – North of Smyrna we come to Pergamum, the most northerly of the seven churches. Located in the province of Mysia it was considered the political capital of the region. Its name means “citadel” (because it was built on a hill over 1,000 feet above a broad plain), but it is also the word from which we get the term “parchment”, a writing material made from animal skins that may have been developed in this area. It was an inland city about 20 miles from the Aegean Sea who for over 250 years served as capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor. This ensured a constant influx of people from different regions but also influenced a high degree of emperor worship. Pagan cults included those worshipping Athena, Asklepios, Bacchus (the god of drunkenness) and Zeus making it a hot-bed of demonic cults and later a source of Gentile false teaching. But their most prominent belief system was the worship of the Roman emperor whom they viewed as a god. In 29BC it became the first city in Asia to build a temple to the Caesar and would later become the center of Caesar-worship. Later in the 4th century it became an early source of the Roman catholic church.
- Thyatira – Now turning east we come to Thyatira, which was located near the River Lycus about halfway between Pergamum and Sardis. Originally established after the defeat of the Persians by Alexander the Great, by the time a church was established there the city had been under Roman rule and influence for over 300 years. Interestingly it was located in a valley and had no natural defenses. As a result it was destroyed and rebuilt several times and eventually became little more than a military garrison. Lydia, the merchant woman led to the Lord by Paul was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14-15). It was an area known for the production of fine purple cloth and was home to many trade guilds, particularly cloth dyers and coppersmiths. Pagan beliefs included the cult-worship of Apollo, as a sun god, and Artemis. This involved pagan festivals, superstition, fortune telling, black magic and immoral practices. The early church began to follow their pagan roots and were influenced by the Balaamites and Nicolaitans. Today nothing remains of the original city. It has been completely covered-over by the modern Turkish city of Akhisar.
- Sardis – Traveling southeast we come to Sardis located on the banks of the Pactolus River. The capital of Lydia, Sardis was one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor. It was a commercial center for the carpet industry and specialized in the production, dying and weaving of fine quality wool. It was a wealthy city and minted some of the first coins in the world. Pagan religion abounded focused primary on Artemis/Diana along with all of the lewd practices associated with that cult. Yet it was also home to one of the largest synagogues in Asia. Interestingly, its remains have been uncovered in the center of the city instead of on the fringes as is normally found. This may indicate that the Jewish population was instrumental in commercial aspects of the region. Today the modern city of Sartmustafa covers the site. It is still located on the same 1,500 foot hill which makes it very defensible. The famous author Aesop came from here.
- Philadelphia – About 30 miles southeast of Sardis we come to Philadelphia (modern Alashehir) on the Gediz River in the region of Manisa. Founded in 190 BC by the Pergamos king Eumenes (197-160 BC) who named the city after his brother Attalus who would become his successor. Just like the American city of the same name it became known as the “City of Brotherly Love”. Attalus did not have any heirs so at his death he relinquished control of the city to Rome. As a result, the emperor Tiberius relieved the city from having to pay taxes.

Located on a major thoroughfare known as the Imperial Post Road it became a key area for commerce and trade. The city had an imperial cult and worshiped the Roman ruler of the time.

- Laodicea – And finally we come to Laodicea, the last city on the Ephesian postal route and the last spoken to by Jesus. Originally called Diospolis – the City of Zeus – Laodicea is located in the Lycus valley and became one of the wealthiest cities in Asia Minor. It was known for its industries for luxurious black wool production, medicine and banking, and was the site of a great medical school. Unlike its neighboring cities of Hierapolis, famous for its hot springs, and Colossae, known for its clear, cold mountain streams, Laodicea lacked a good water supply and even massive aqueducts brought poor quality water than affected both their physical and spiritual health. Although it had a large Jewish population it was also a center for the pagan worship of Apollo and Zeus. Despite that, Laodicea became home to an early Christian church that was mentioned by Paul in his letter to the church at Colosse (Colossians 4:16).

Content and Format of the Letters:

The seven letters of Jesus letters follow a set pattern:

- First He announces Himself and establishes His sovereignty. He does this in a slightly different way in each letter.
- He then commends each church for their faithfulness and deeds.
- Third, He brings condemnation and highlights their particular sins and failures.
- He then demands repentance in order to survive His wrath.
- And finally, He gives an indication of the blessings and curses that will result from their reaction to His demand.

How Did Jesus Address Them?

In chapter 1 Jesus leaves no doubt who the author of the letters is. “I am the Alpha and Omega”, says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to become, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8) – “I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!” (Revelation 1:17-18).

Now He introduces Himself to each church in a slightly different way – personally – and with a specific greeting for each one. But as we will see, there is also a consistent message. In each case He highlights the fact that His words are the words of God.

- To Ephesus – “These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.”
- To Smyrna – “These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”
- To Pergamum – “These are the words of Him who has the sharp double-edged sword.”
- To Thyatira – “These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.”
- To Sardis – “These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.”
- To Philadelphia – “These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.”

- To Laodicea – “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler of God’s creation.”

What should we pay attention to?

As we’ll see there are seven letters to seven churches. Two of the churches are faithful and five are not. Interestingly we will see that sometimes what we would call faithful obedience Jesus calls out as distraction. In each letter Jesus addresses areas of obedience and the roots of disobedience. We will learn valuable lessons from each example.

This character-lesson of faithfulness does not just recognize the actions of these ancient churches. They also represent the church of today and as we go through each one I believe we’ll begin to mentally align their character with modern churches and denominations – particularly our own. These churches were all well established. Many saw growth in size and faith, but most eventually fell away. A few remained steadfast despite persecution, but most fell away to either complacency, pride, self-absorption, wealth or tolerance of outright sin --- just like churches today.

As we go through each church we will clearly see where those who were disobedient got off track. As we do, we will better understand how these seven examples clearly represent all churches and all denominations across time, and more importantly we’ll learn where we need to be alert to our own motives and actions.

Wow! What a journey we are on.

LESSON 11

Revelation, chapter 2, verses 1-7

The Church at Ephesus:

In our last lesson, we did a quick review of all seven churches in Revelation. This was to ensure we had a basic understanding of the culture in which these churches existed. That's important because we should always study scripture in light of its context, and in the case of these churches, that includes their geography, history, commerce, culture and religious background, because that will help us see the culture the people came from and how it might have influenced their functioning as a church -- just like culture does today.

Overview:

At the time the Apostle John lived in Ephesus the city was already over a thousand years old. One of twelve ancient Greek-Athenian cities known as the Ionian League, it had a population of over 225,000 people and was considered the third most important city in the Roman empire; eclipsed only by Rome and Alexandria. Known as the "Gateway to Asia", Ephesus was a center of commerce. Its location on the Cayster River afforded direct access to a magnificent deep-water bay on the Aegean Sea. This made it a key maritime trading port, an international commercial hub and a center for banking, with trade routes going out from the city and across Asia Minor. But beyond all this Ephesus was known for the wickedness of its cult-worship of the mythical Greek/Roman goddess Artemis/Diana. In the seventh century BC the Ephesians built an enormous temple for her worship; the Artemision, which was 230 feet wide, 425 feet long, made of solid marble and embossed with gold and jewels. Today it is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, which in itself is a sad commentary about what we consider to be a "wonder". The Artemis/Diana cult included the practice of dark magic, extremely immoral worship practices, sacrifices, drunkenness, orgies and self-mutilation. It was here that a riot broke out against Paul when the gospel message began to impact the lucrative business of manufacturing idols of Artemis/Diana (Acts 19:23-41).

History of the Church:

The Book of Acts and the epistles of Paul give us a great deal of information about the church at Ephesus. Paul initially visited there while traveling with Aquila and his wife Priscilla; a Jewish-Christian couple he met in Corinth (Acts 18:18). Like Paul they were tent makers and established a business in Ephesus (Acts 18:1-3). But more importantly they also planted a church that met in their home which may have been the initial start of the Ephesian church (1 Corinthians 16:19). When Paul left Ephesus for Caesarea, Aquilla and Priscilla stayed behind. It was then a Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus. He was a follower of John the Baptist, and although he knew scripture well, believed Jesus was the Messiah and preached boldly, but he did not fully understand the emerging details behind the gospel. So after hearing him speak, Aquilla and Priscilla invited Apollos to their home and explained the true meaning of the crucifixion, resurrection and our rebirth through Christ. Now armed with a full understanding of the truth about Jesus, Apollos - "...vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah." (Acts 18:28 / quoting 28). Paul himself preached at Ephesus for three years;

two of those years teaching daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, where he did "...extraordinary miracles..." as he shared the gospel. As a result, the gospel spread, many were converted and the church grew (Acts 19:9-11 / 20:31). Amazingly because of Paul's teaching in Ephesus the word of God spread along the postal route and trade routes "...so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." (Acts 19:10). So much so that Demetrius, a silversmith who specialized in making idols of Artemis/Diana incited a riot because "...this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia." (Acts 19:26). Even so, it was Paul's intention to stay in Ephesus - "...until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me." (1 Corinthians 16:8-9). He may have wanted to stay because Pentecost was the same month as the ancient Ephesian Games (second only to the Olympics in size and pageantry), which would have allowed him to preach the gospel to an incoming crowd of spectators from across the known world. Sadly, when he finally left Ephesus Paul's message to the church elders was grim. A message we will see later in the church's amazing gift of discernment. "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning you night and day with tears." (Acts 20:29-31).

After Paul left, Timothy preached at Ephesus with Paul's guidance to further reinforced his concern for the intrusion of false teachers - "As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, stay here in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies." (1 Timothy 1:3). Tychicus, another pastor, who had carried Paul's letter to the Ephesians (Ephesians 6:21-22) may have also been sent there to preach. - "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus" (2 Timothy 4:11-12). It is also a probability the apostle John himself preached at Ephesus while he was living there. Obviously the church at Ephesus had a wonderful start with great leaders and pastors. It is no wonder they began to grow and spread the word across Asia Minor. But as we will see, excitement and enthusiasm to do great things for God may ultimately distract us from the greatest prize of all -- simple love for our Savior.

Now let's study chapter 2, verses 1-7:

1. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write". "These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

So let's unpack each verse:

1. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write". "These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."

Here Jesus introduces Himself to a church who knows Him well. This reaffirms that even though John is the human conduit, the author of the letter is Jesus. In chapter 1 He had already made it very clear who He is speaking to; the pastor or messenger [the star] from the church in Ephesus [the lampstand]. - "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in My right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." -- What I find most important in 2:1 is the fact Jesus "...walks among..." His church. He was there, with them, just as He is with us. Nurturing their faith and seeking to restore their obedience.

2. "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false."

In the same literary style used in most of these letters Jesus begins with a commendation. In doing so He highlights several key elements of their obedience:

2a. "I know..." --- Jesus is speaking to people He knows --- true believers. Although Jesus certainly "knows" all things and all people -- "For His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He sees all his steps." (Job 34:21), - in this verse He is using the word "know" in a more intimate way. - "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me." (John 10:27-30).- "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." (John 10:14). What an amazingly encouraging truth. Jesus "knows" who everyone is because of His total omniscience, but He "knows" those of us who believe in Him as their Savior in a much different way. He knows us as His own, because of our love for Him. - "But whoever loves God is known by Him." (1 Corinthians 8:3). This is in marked contrast to the Lord's response to unbelievers lost at judgment - "...I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:23). We should not take this lightly. Whether as an individual or as a church we can never forget the fact Jesus "knows" us in a way He does not know the lost. This is a relationship we must nourish through prayer and obedience, and simply having Jesus on our minds all the time.

2b. "...your deeds..." --- Jesus knew well the "deeds" of those in the church. These are not just things they did in service to the church. These were activities and efforts Jesus considered to be "deeds" -- a noun that means "An action that is performed intentionally or consciously." (Oxford Dictionary). These are not meant to seek salvation through works (Ephesians 2:8-10), but are intentional, positive, faithful actions of those who seek to please the Lord.

2c. "...your hard work" --- This is not just work. This is hard work; toil, sweat producing effort that takes all you have to accomplish. This is not just activities done for the church, these are actions and efforts accomplished through diligence and sacrifice. Taken with the word "deeds", we see the believers at Ephesus working hard to accomplish positive service intended to glorify God.

2d. "...and perseverance..." --- And it was not just good deeds and hard work Jesus commends them for, but also for service performed under intense pressure and persecution. First century

believers in a place like Ephesus (much like believers around the world today) were surrounded by a culture that was counter to everything Jesus taught. It was a place of great darkness and demonic influence. It was a place where they would be ridiculed by both Jews and Pagan believers. It was a place where their leaders were pulled before a furious and riotous crowd to accuse them of for causing "...trouble all over the world..." (Acts 17:6 / 19:23-41). Yet, they showed perseverance in their faith. Recall that John, who was probably living in Ephesus when he was exiled to Patmos for sharing the gospel, was "...your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance." (Revelation 1:9). Because of that, Jesus commended the Ephesians for their persistent faith.

2e. "...I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false." -- This is a church who hated sin. They didn't tolerate it and they didn't overlook it. They also did not tolerate people or leaders who were in sin. That's critically important because the entire time Paul was in Ephesus he warned the church's leaders - "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning you night and day with tears." (Acts 20:29-31). -- Jesus had given Paul insight into the enemy's future attacks on the church. Not only from external false teachers - "...savage wolves that will come in...", but more importantly from within the church itself - "...men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples." - To us this might seem like something that would never happen. But I believe this threat has never been more real than it is today. Just listen carefully to TV preachers, YouTube commentators or even books on the shelves at well-known Christian bookstores, and you will quickly find example after example of false doctrine and warped theology. All influenced by the same enemy that influenced the false teachers in Ephesus two thousand years ago. That's why Jesus commended them for the fact they "...cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.". So how did the Ephesian church "test" false teachers and self-professing apostles and prove them wrong? Through their knowledge of God's word. Just as Paul warned Timothy - "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who as far as the faith is concerned are rejected." (Exodus 7:11 / 2 Timothy 3:8). Paul then reminds Timothy how to combat these teachers - "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training..." (2 Timothy 3:16). This is why in our Sunday School class we will intentionally seek to understand God's word in detail. Just As he warned Ephesus to "...be on your guard!...", so too he warns us. Otherwise how will he know whether or not the TV preacher is a "...savage wolf...", or how will we know when any other pastor or teacher leads you astray, or how will we know if the latest Christian book you read is fundamentally sound or fraught with untruths. You won't. Not unless you seek to know God's word and the truth within. It was this knowledge for which Jesus was commending the church at Ephesus. A knowledge, through diligent study, that enabled them to test "...those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.". I pray the same for us.

3. "You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary." --- Here Jesus expands on the commendation of perseverance and hardship with a critical qualifier - "...for my Name..." - Despite the hardship and suffering associated with their walk in a pagan land they continued to persevere in the name of Jesus. They were unafraid and undaunted by their

surrounding culture and the attacks of the enemy's wolves and continued to pursue efforts expounding the name of Jesus. And remarkably they did so "...and have not grown weary." They didn't give up, throw in the towel, leave the church or revert back to pagan ways. They persevered through the "...hard work", "savage wolves" and from their own internal distractors and they never failed to do what they did "for" His Name.

So given all of these commendations what kind of church do we see at Ephesus? An amazing church. A vibrant church. A doing, going, serving, helping, nurturing, discipling, discerning, hardworking, sweat producing, truth seeking, Christ glorifying church. This is a church every God-fearing, Christ-loving Christian would love to belong to. Right? Well, if the passage of scripture ended here there is no doubt the church at Ephesus would be the model for all churches. But Jesus didn't stop there. He adds another important qualifier. A heart-wrenching truth that brings all of this beautiful effort to a crashing burn...

4. "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first."

4a - "...Yet...". Wow. After hearing God commend the church at Ephesus with such wonderful accolades for their diligent works and faithful service, Jesus stuns the listening congregation with the words "...Yet...", or put another way, "But, there's something else you need to know."

4b. - "I hold this against you..." --- As this letter was being read to the church at Ephesus it was at this point you could hear a pin drop. "I", God, the I AM, Jesus, the Savior of the World and King of kings shakes the church to their very core by proclaiming - "I hold this against you...". Not, "Good job, but I see the need for a little improvement.". Instead, this was direct and severe condemnation from God Himself that He "...holds against..." the church the error of their ways. It is severe because each word in this sentence would reverberate a shockwave:

- "I" - God speaks...
- "hold" - an action word. Not just "have" this against you, but "hold"; which is a tight grip on the reality that something is seriously wrong.
- "this" - not a grouping of issues but a single, important, critical failure.
- "against" - a word that indicates pressure. As in holding something "against" the wall with force. In this case, Jesus has something "against" the church and their actions. It's not that He's simply displeased, but He is against - in distinct conflict -- with what they are doing.

4c. - "You have forsaken the love you had at first." ---- Despite their wonderful actions, deeds, hard work and perseverance, they have failed. And failed to the point Jesus holds against them a sin they probably never saw coming - they have lost their first love for the Lord. The intimate and exciting love they had when they first realized the truth that God had died an earthly death and rose in divine resurrection, so that they could spend eternity with Him. It was a love they had when they sought to know Jesus every day. They shared His message, they studied His word and they yearned almost uncontrollably to be with Him. And now they were being told their true love of Jesus had been replaced by their love for doing things for Jesus. A problem summarized in an old quote --- "I was on my way to see my Savior when I ran into Service. I then got so distracted I forgot who I was going to see." --- This is what happened to Ephesus. They became so focused on their beautiful, hard-won works, their perseverance and discernment, that they became distracted, then comfortable, then complacent. And without even realizing what was happening, all of this effort and action drew them away from their focus on Christ. How sad this is, but how

common it is to this day. Could a Bible-believing, hard-working, persevering church, doing all these wonderful deeds still fall out of love with Jesus? Could church activities, growth, buildings, programs, outreach and a dozen other good efforts be distracting enough to draw us into a sense of comfort and to the point our love-focus on Jesus might be clouded? Yes it could, and yes it has. In many churches. That's why Pastor Fred reset our focus on "To Know Jesus and to Make Him Known". The focus is on Jesus; always on Jesus. Who He is, what He is, what He wills, what He expects of children who seek to return their Savior's love. This doesn't mean service and deeds at church are wrong. To the contrary. Ephesus was doing all the right things, but in doing so they became so invested and overwhelmed with their service that they set aside their Savior --- and sadly, had no idea it was happening.

5. "Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

Now Jesus, who is amongst His church, reaches out to help them understand what they need to do.

5a. - "Consider how far you have fallen!" - The word "consider" means to remember, to analyze, to seek to understand what they had done. And in doing so understand how "far" they had fallen. He wanted them to understand the depth of their fall. Not a fall that might happen, but a fall that has already happened.

5b. - "Repent" - And after considering and understanding Jesus expects them to fall penitently to their knees and repent for their sin of losing their true love.

5c. - "...and do the things you did at first." - Here Jesus is asking them to remember the joy of their first love by stepping away from the distraction of "doing" and become focused on loving Jesus. - -- It's sort of like a marriage. Do you recall the excitement you had when you first met your spouse? You couldn't wait to see them again, you thought about them all the time and you did everything you could to make them happy. But over time life takes hold. Bills, kids, mortgage, health...all kinds of things begin to distract you and cloud your focus. Some marriages never make it through these issues and loose love entirely. Others stick it out and make it work but become comfortable with their spouse, to the point they may become complacent. They forget to say "I love you", they forget to say "I forgive you", they forget the joy of just sitting together for small talk. Oh they're still in love and honor each other dearly, but they have lost their "first love". The excitement and anticipation. And just like the church at Ephesus they must "Repent and do the things you did at first." -- That's a life-lesson I fail at every day.

5d. - "If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." -- Here Jesus gives them the consequences of not doing as He asks. If they openly fail to "consider", fail to "repent" and fail to "do the things you did at first.", He will remove their lampstand - their light to the world - their influence over darkness - their effectiveness of sharing the gospel.

6.- "But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." -- But Jesus doesn't want to leave them in total despair and reminds them of another victory. They hate the practices of the false teachers called the Nicolaitians. Scholars are not sure who they were but they are mentioned again in the letter to the church at Pergamum (Revelation 2:15). Acts 6:5 mentions a Nicolas being one of the first seven deacons but there is no direct biblical connection

to the false teachers in Ephesus. Although it's certainly possible that Nicolas became an apostate preacher and these were his followers. Although we're not exactly sure who they were, Clement of Alexandria said of them, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." In either case, the discerning Ephesians rooted them out and hated their ways. - -- But I think there's a little more to this that is not so positive. In order to hate false doctrine you must first understand true doctrine. The underlying meaning to me is the fact they knew the truth well enough to hate what was false. This means they had no excuse for not understanding what Jesus expected of them.

7. - "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

In closing, the letter Jesus tells them to pay attention to what is being said to them (and us), by Him and through the Holy Spirit. If they do, and if they repent and return to their first love they will be victorious -- an overcomer in the words of John (1 John 5:4-5). He also reminds them of the gift from the tree of life in the paradise of God, which in itself is an end-times prophecy -- linking the beginning of mankind (Genesis 2:9) with the end -- "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse." (Revelation 22:1-3).

So what do we learn?

This is the first of seven letters to the perpetual church, but to me the story of the Ephesian church is the most tragic of the seven. They worked so hard and were so diligent, but in their haste to do good "works" they lost their focus on Jesus. They were afforded the very best leaders and teachers, including Paul and the Apostle John, and they worked hard at serving Jesus. So hard they lost their focus on the Lord and their efforts became self-focused and self-absorbing. Their desire to "do" ended up distracting them from "Who". This is a lesson we must all understand and pay attention to.

LESSON 12

Revelation, Chapter 2:8-11

The Church at Smyrna

Overview:

The ancient city of Smyrna (present day Izmir Turkey), is named after the aromatic perfume "myrrh" that was manufactured there. Located north of Ephesus on the Hermus River it lay on a deep-water port which made the city a prominent trading center with roads reaching out across Asia Minor and sea-lanes extending throughout the known world. Even in John's time it was already an ancient city. Founded by the Aeolians in the 11th century BC, it was later inhabited by Ionians, Leleges and Greeks before eventually becoming a territory of Rome. Often called the "Crown of Asia", it was considered one of the most beautiful cities in Asia Minor, and by the first century had a population of over 100,000 people. Well known as a center for science and medicine it was also a hub of literary culture from which the author Homer - writer of the Iliad and the Odyssey - was born. Smyrna was extremely loyal to Rome which made it a free city immune to the harsh treatment often felt by less loyal territories. Although segments of the population worshiped the usual band of Greek and Roman mythical gods, the people's affection for Rome led to an intense religious cult-following of emperor worship. By the second century BC they built a temple to the goddess Roma, the patron saint of Rome, but they were also one of the first cities in the Roman Empire to build a temple specifically for worship of the Caesar. Over time emperor worship became mandatory and the government required citizens to make an annual offering to the Caesar acknowledging him as their lord. For this they were given a written certificate officially documenting their recognition of Caesar as a god. Without this certificate your life was in great danger. This was the case for the Smyrna Christians who refused to comply even in the face of severe and constant persecution. Persecution that was not only religious in nature but just as much political. Generally Christians living in any pagan society would come under some level persecution, but as we'll see several of the seven churches did not seem to be as heavily persecuted as Smyrna --- and for a couple they may not have been persecuted at all. This may be because their faith was weak or they tolerated sin and as a result were "Christian" in name only. If this is true, they probably caused little or no trouble for the government or society and were largely ignored. Not so with the church at Smyrna. If the commendations of Jesus are an indication of their suffering, then it is clear they suffered greatly for His Name.

The city of Smyrna had a sizeable Jewish population. Undoubtedly a few of these converted to Christianity, but for the most part the Jews hated the Christians and played a key role in their persecution. We see this in the words of Jesus (V9) but also in the documented stories that come from that era. According to early church history, one of the church's early leaders, Polycarp (69-155AD), who may have been led to the Lord by John himself, was burned at the stake when he was 86 years old. He was brought before the Roman court and given the choice: deny Christ, proclaim the emperor as lord, and be allowed to live. Or, fail to comply and be burned at the stake. As recorded by eyewitnesses just five years later he is quoted as saying --- "For 80 and 6 years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King and my Savior." --- The same eyewitnesses documented the fact it was the Jews who helped stoke the fire

of his death. Polycarp would become one of the first of over five million Christians to be executed by the Romans over the next 200 years.

So let's read the letter from Jesus to the suffering church:

8. "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9. I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of satan. 10. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of 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 at all by the second death."

Let's break this down:

When reading this letter two things stick out in my mind:

First, there are no accolades like there were for Ephesus. Jesus doesn't mention deeds or hard work or biblical discernment. Instead, He celebrates their strong faith but from the position of poverty and persecution. A position He personally knew all too well.

Second, there is no condemnation. Five of the seven churches receive severe rebukes and condemnation for their failures, but not Smyrna. They only receive encouragement.

8. - "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again."

8a. - "These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last..." --- As with all seven letters Jesus makes it clear He is the author. Here He reinforces what He had already proclaimed in chapter 1 by emphasizing two unique characteristics: that He is eternal and resurrected. This is a theme we find throughout the Bible:

- "Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come." (Revelation 1:4). [First and Last]
- He is the Alpha and Omega [First and Last] (1:8 / 21:6, 22:13), the eternal, all knowing, Almighty, all Holy God.
- "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. The First and Last of all things. The all sovereign head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead." (Colossians 1:17-18 / Revelation 1:5).
- "I, the Lord - with the first of them and with the last - I am He." (Isaiah 41:4)

8b. - "...who died and came to life again..."

- "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!" (Revelation 1:8). This is uniquely Jesus; the Almighty King of kings because He is not only the First and the Last, but also the living from the dead --- the only one resurrected who will never die again --- and as such, He is the true Messiah. (John 11:25-26 / 1 Thessalonians 4:14 / Acts 26:22-23 / Matthew 16:16 / Luke 2:11). And as the Messiah He came to earth as man (John 1:14), to

die a human death (Philippians 2:6-8), to be raised victorious in life (John 11:25-26 / 1 Corinthians 15:57), so that mankind may be eternally redeemed (John 3:16-17).

- I also believe He emphasizes the victory of His death and resurrection to encourage the Smyrna church. They too will suffer death through persecution but will live resurrected as the faithful who are caught-up in victory with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- This is a promise He extends to the faithful at Smyrna who suffer like Him but more importantly suffer for Him.

9. - "I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of satan."

9a. - "I know your afflictions..." - Jesus knew first-hand exactly how the believers in Smyrna were suffering. He had been taunted and beaten, scourged, rejected, tortured and crucified. He did this to offer God's free grace to man but also to present Himself as a man we can relate to (Hebrews 4:15).

9b. - "... and your poverty..." -- Jesus could have entered earth as a mighty King, which is exactly what Israel was expecting. Yet, He came as a poor man who could relate directly to the hardships of Smyrna. As citizens who failed to acknowledge Caesar as god they would have undoubtedly lost their jobs; people would shun their businesses and not buy their goods or services. As a result they would be wretchedly poor. Not just poor to the point of need, but poor to the point of pure poverty.

9c. - "...yet you are rich! -- Why? Because their poverty meant they did not "...store up for themselves treasures on earth." But instead laid up treasures for themselves in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). Their poverty, although more difficult than anything we have ever known, removed the material wealth that so often clutters our lives (and our attics) and distracts us from our dependence on God. Instead, they were so spiritually rich that Jesus celebrates their wealth in Him - "...that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding of God's mystery, that is Christ Himself..." (Colossians 2:3).

9d. - "I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of satan." -- God chose Israel as His messenger; a people to carry His word to the world. But they failed. From the earliest days of the post-wandering settlement of the Promised Land until today, Israel has gone through cycle after cycle of obedience and disobedience. But their greatest sin is the one that exists to this day --- they do not recognize Jesus as their Messiah. "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:42). Therefore, the Jews at Smyrna were Jews only in ethnic background, but not Jews in the sense God intended as His chosen nation. As such, their worship in the synagogue was (and is) a blasphemy because they continue to look for their King who has already come -- a King they killed and continue to kill His name even to this day - "Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him." (Acts 7:52 / 4:10 / Rom 2:28). So if they were unbelievers then their synagogue was not a place to worship Jesus, but a place to blaspheme through their unbelief.

At this point in most of the other letters Jesus switches to condemnation. But not to church of Smyrna. It receives no condemnation at all. Instead Jesus gives them encouragement in the face of great distress and trial.

10. - "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

10a - "Do not be afraid"... "of what you are about to suffer." -- There are over 360 verses in the Bible where our Lord tells us not to fear. These are some of the most beautiful and strengthening promises in God's word to help His children not be afraid. It is with these words that God comforts our hearts through trials and circumstances in life.

- "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)
- "Immediately He spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (Mark 6:50)
- "For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, "Do not fear; I will help you." (Isaiah 41:13)

10b. "I tell you the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days." -- Persecution for many includes prison, as it was for Paul on several occasions, and for John on Patmos. But with the comment about "...ten days..." Jesus indicates the suffering will be limited by time. "And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." (1 Peter 5:10).

10c - "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." --- Here Jesus asks them one of the most difficult tasks of our faith - be strong even unto death. This sounds easy, but if He were to said that to us today it would undoubtedly change how we approach Jesus and life. He does so by offering them "...the crown of life...". This symbolism would have been clear to those in Smyrna. In their culture wreathed crowns of garland were often awarded to prominent citizens, those who had accomplished great deeds or victors of athletic competition. But here Jesus is offering them eternal rewards - "Blessed is the one who preserves under trial, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (James 1:12). Paul expressed a similar sentiment, "In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8).

11. - "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." --- And with this Jesus closes the letter much like He does the others, with a command to listen and pay attention. But to Smyrna He adds the encouraging promise, - "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." - The first death is our human death. For believers we die only once because when we die we go to be with the Lord and at the Rapture will be resurrected to eternal life with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 / Revelation 20:6). But the second death is for unbelievers who are not escorted into heaven or raptured with the believers, but who will instead be raised after the Millennium to participate in the final White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:6 / 14 / 21:8). This is much more than the

physical death. The second death is a spiritual death when the unbeliever is eternally separated from God; a death from which there is no return. Jesus was encouraging the suffering Smyrnians by reminding them that this punishment was not meant for them.

So what do we learn:

Unlike Ephesus, Jesus doesn't recognize Smyrna's physical accomplishments, deeds, hard work and perseverance. Instead, He celebrates their suffering. -- In doing so He shows us that the life of a faithful church can be hard. So when I read about Smyrna I don't think about our church. I think about the mud-brick prayer houses in Burkina-Faso, the Pakistani's in the PunJab worshipping in an open field just minutes from muslim extremist who hate them, the North Koreans who risk death just to own a Bible, or a local church in the slums of a city who meet in an old storefront nestled between strip clubs and bars.

With all this suffering isn't it amazing that anyone would want to be associated with a church going through such trials. But they did; and God's recognition of their suffering are the accolades of their true faith. Can you imagine what their worship service must have been like? The strength of their faith, the power of their prayers and their total and complete trust in Jesus -- even unto death. Given that a profound quote comes to mind -- "We should be not be surprised when we are persecuted; we should be surprised when we are not."

I think of a video I saw of a young Christian woman in Syria. She described the extremely harsh conditions for Christians and the constant persecution, beatings and executions. Then she told about the day she and her husband gathered her little children to tell them evil men were coming with swords. They would yell at them and demand they denounce the name of Jesus. She told the children they would be beaten and probably killed. Even so, they all agreed they would never deny Christ -- even little children in the face of death. Sadly this was not a story of ancient persecution in a culture long-since gone. This is happening today - right now - as you read this our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are living the life of Smyrna.

When I saw the video I thought of the people of ancient Smyrna and the intense suffering they endured --- intense enough that God wanted it documented for future generations to see. This is a suffering we as American Christians simply do not understand -- and as a result, I believe our faith has become so weakened and distracted we do not feel the true strength of our God.

LESSON 13

Revelation, Chapter 2:12-17

The Church at Pergamum

Overview:

Located about 100 miles north of Ephesus, Pergamum was the farthest north of the seven churches of Asia Minor. Its name means "citadel", probably because it was built on a fortified hill that stood over 1,000 feet above a broad plain. The name is also associated with the word "parchment" which was a writing material made from animal skins that is reported to have first been developed in this area. This could correspond with the fact that Pergamum was a city of literacy and learning, and home to the second largest library in the ancient world (behind Alexandria Egypt), housing over 200,000 handwritten scrolls. Even though Pergamum was located 20 miles from the Aegean Sea, and therefore didn't benefit from the sea-trade as Ephesus and Smyrna did, it still served as capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor for over 250 years. This made it a very powerful city with a constant influx of leaders and dignitaries from different regions. Their close association with Rome also influenced a high degree of emperor worship. So much so that Pergamum built one of the first temples specifically to worship the human leaders of Rome. But demonic pagan worship cults were the core of their belief system. Particularly worship of the Greek god Zeus. This brought with it a wide range of deplorable sins and unbelievable acts of blood-lust, violence and immorality. As we will see, satan not only influenced the demonic culture of the people, but made significant inroads into the Christian church as well. Ironically, by the 4th century this combination of religious rituals, leader worship and allegiance to Rome would become the catalyst for the formation of the "Roman" Catholic Church.

So let's read the letter from Jesus to the church of satan's throne:

12. "To the angel of the church at Pergamum write: These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13. I know where you live - where satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in Me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city -- where satan lives. 14. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."

Let's explore its meaning:

12. "To the angel of the church at Pergamum write: These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword."

12a. - In His opening remarks to Ephesus and Smyrna Jesus provided encouragement and hope. To Ephesus He reassured them He is the one "...who hold the seven stars [pastors] in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands [churches]. (2:1). In other words, I am with you, protecting you and walking among you in order to help you. Likewise to Smyrna he wrote - "...the words of Him who is the First and Last, who died and came to life again." (2:8). These would have been very encouraging words for a persecuted church who faced death for their faith in Jesus because they knew they would arise to eternal victory.

12b. - But to Pergamum Jesus initially uses no words of encouragement and simply cuts to the chase -- "These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword." --- His message is crystal clear "I am the one who will bring judgment on you." No comfort. No words of hope. He sees their sin and is prepared to deal with them.

12c - As a refresher let's review what we discussed in verse 1:16 --- "...and coming out of His mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword." --- The symbolism of a double-edged sword would have been recognized by a first century reader as the Roman short sword. The Spanish "Gladius Hispaniensis" which had become the most common fighting implement of John's day; a weapon used specifically for close combat. But biblically the sword "...coming out of His mouth.", is the judgment of Jesus through His word. - "There is a Judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day." (John 12:48). His word, which includes His expectations and commands for His people is - "...alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword..." (Hebrews 4:12). In the case of Pergamum His words do not bring comfort and peace, but promises judgment, just as we'll see near the end of Revelation when Jesus arrives as the Warrior King with His word - "Coming out of His mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.", -- and -- "The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse..." (Revelation 19:15 and 21). What comes out of Jesus' mouth is not a physical sword, it is the almighty power of His spoken and written word - the power of God, the breath of God, the truth of God; used here for final judgment and destruction (2 Timothy 3:16). To those who accept His word there is salvation, but for the church at Pergamum it could mean quick judgment -- which one they received was up to them.

13. - "I know where you live - where satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in Me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city -- where satan lives."

13a. - "I know where you live..." - To the church at Ephesus Jesus says "I know your deeds..." (2:2), and to Smyrna "I know your afflictions..." (2:9). In both cases Jesus makes it clear that He understands them and "knows" them as a Shepherd knows His sheep (John 10:27). But to the church at Pergamum His tone changes and His acknowledgment is more threatening - "I know where you live...". In other words, I am watching and I know where to find you. I know who is around you and I know how you are being influenced by them.

13b. - And where is that? - "...where satan has his throne..." - In addition to being a center of emperor worship Pergamum was a hub for the worship of the Greek god Zeus; the mythological god of sky, lightning and thunder, the king of the olympians, the leader of the Greek gods, and as such, was one of satan's most deadly tools of demonic influence (even to this day). In Pergamum was a huge altar to zeus now called the "Pergamum Altar", which is, today, one of the most famous items in the Berlin Collection of Classical Antiquities. It is a large horseshoe shaped temple over 60 feet tall that makes it look like a giant throne. Historians believe it housed a large bronze bull used for sacrifices, where victims were placed inside the bull and roasted alive as their screams echoed out of the bull's mouth to the ears of the ecstatic worshipers. It is this "throne" that many scholars believe Jesus was referring to as satan's throne.

13c. - "Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in Me...". -- Despite their surroundings and cultural influence the church as a whole was faithful, and even under great spiritual deception remained true to His Name. We can take from this that even in this hyper-sinful and demonic culture the church was, at least part of them, able to persevere in their faith.

13d. - "...not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city..." - The Bible doesn't tell us who Antipas was. Maybe an early church leader. But we can tell from the comments made by Jesus that he was a man who was a faithful witness even to the point of death. Jesus singles him out as encouragement to the others who were undoubtedly having to endure great punishment.

13e. - "...where satan lives...." - This is the second direct reference to satan. I believe Jesus stressed this to let us know just how evil the city truly was.

14. "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality."

14a. - "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you:..." - Unlike Smyrna who had no condemnation, Jesus will now highlight the sin He has seen in the Pergamum church and why He has come to announce their judgment

14b. - " There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality." -- - In Numbers, chapters 22-25 is the somewhat confusing story of Balaam, a sorcerer and false-prophet. The son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Nabaraim (Numbers 23:3-6), he was hired by Balak the king of Moab to put a curse on his enemy Israel. But God intervened and caused Balaam to bless Israel rather than cursing them. Unsuccessful at directly cursing Israel Balaam advised Moab to send their women to Israel to entice their men into immoral relationships. This resulted in the Moabite women seducing the men of Israel and "...invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people [Israel] ate and bowed down before these gods. So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them." (Numbers 25:1-3). This led to God destroying 24,000 Israelites with a plague.

15. "Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." This is the same group of false teachers who are mentioned in the letter to the church at Ephesus. --- "But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

(2:6). Scholars are not sure who the Nicolaitans were but their mention in two of the letters makes it clear they were an evil community. This is emphasized in a contemporary quote from Clement of Alexandria who said, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." - Whoever they were, they had infiltrated the church, but unlike what the faithful at Ephesus had done the church at Pergamum does not appear to have rooted them out. Instead Jesus says "...you..." (the church) "...also have [among you] those who hold [believe] to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." The church at Ephesus had identified who they were and hated them, but the church at Pergamum harbored them and were therefore impacted by their demonic influence.

16. "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

Here Jesus takes his threat of judgment to the next step. He offers an opportunity to repent and drive evil from the church. If not, he will personally fight them with the truth of His word they had abandoned.

17. "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."

17a. - "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." - As He does with all the letters Jesus tells them to pay attention.

17b - "To the one who is victorious..." - But He will spare those who repent, drive out the evil influencers and return to Him.

17c - "I will give some of the hidden manna.." - Manna, the food provided by God to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16:15), a sample of which was kept in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 16:33 / Hebrews 9:4 / John 6:31). And now it speaks of Jesus, the Bread of Life "...who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:33-35).

17d. - "I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it." -- This may refer to a white stone that in ancient Greek culture was given to victors of athletic games. It recognized someone as overcoming all obstacles to claim the prize. "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14). The name may refer to our identity as a person in Christ.

So what do we learn from the church at Pergamum? Simply, they had been infiltrated by the world. The fact their members included followers of Balaam and the Nicolaitans means they were corrupted from within. As Paul had warned the churches - "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning you night and day with tears." (Acts 20:29-31). The leaders of the Pergamum church had tolerated the false teaching of these groups. This type of church behavior was cited by Peter - "They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness." (2 Peter 2:15), and by Jude who said "...they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error." (Jude 11). But David Jeremiah explains it this way -- "If you cannot conquer them, corrupt them." - The enemy had not come

against Pergamum from outside. He attacked them from within and was successful because they tolerated the enemy's sinful influence. For that they would be punished.

This is a sin that every church must be alert to.

LESSON 14

Revelation Chapter 2:18-29

To the Church at Thyatira:

Overview:

We now turn southeast from Pergamum and travel about 40 miles to the city of Thyatira -- the modern Turkish city of Akhisar. Located on the Lycus River about 50 miles inland from the Aegean Sea it is about halfway between Pergamum and Sardis. Originally called Pelopia its name was changed to Thyatira about 290 BC by king Seleucus Nicator I. Interestingly it was located in a valley and had no natural defenses. As a result it was destroyed and rebuilt several times and eventually became little more than a military garrison. Lydia, a merchant woman led to the Lord by Paul was from Thyatira (Acts 16:14-15). Later Paul and Silas also used Lydia's home for worship with other believers (V40), and even though the Bible doesn't say, maybe Lydia returned to Thyatira and helped establish the church there? Lydia was a merchant in purple cloth (the most expensive type) which was produced in Thyatira. What was otherwise a small thriving city was marred by the fact that demonic pagan beliefs were rampant including the cult-worship of Apollo, a sun god, and Artemis/Diana. Just as with Ephesus this involved pagan festivals, superstition, fortune telling, black magic and immoral practices. Sadly, we will see these influences deeply penetrate the church.

So let's read the letter from Jesus to the church of toleration:

18. "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: "These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. 20. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 24. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, I will not impose any other burden on you, 25. except to hold on to what you have until I come. 26. To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations, -- 27. that one will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery -- just as I have received authority from my Father. 28. I will also give one the morning star. 29. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

So let's break it down:

18. "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: "These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze."

18a. - In chapter 1 Jesus used similar words to describe Himself as the source of Revelation - "...and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man..." "...his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace." (1:13-15). This text is very similar with one key difference. Verse 1:13 attributes these characteristics to "...someone like a son of man...", while verse 2:18 says they are from "...the Son of God." This is a key difference. The term "like" a "son of man" references the prior earthly incarnation of God in flesh (John 1:14), who while on earth, "...made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant..." (Philippians 2:7). This is Christ's humanity when He came as the supreme atoning sacrifice. But the character of Jesus in chapter 2 is Jesus as God; fully divine and all holy. This is the Jesus who has already provided the source of atonement and is now prepared to judge those who will not accept God's gift of grace.

18b. - "...whose eyes are like blazing fire..." - This is the omniscience of God; the all seeing and all knowing, all holy God.

He is the one who sees all -- "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13).

He is the one who knows all - "Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, you know all." (Psalms 139:4).

He is the one who understands all - "Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite." (Psalms 147:5).

And He is the one who searches all - "O Lord, you have searched me and known me." (Psalms 139:1). The eyes of God are like blazing fire; searching, penetrating, all seeing. And in the case of the church, nothing happens within the church or within its members that is not known by Him - "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous..." (1 Peter 3:12-14).

18c. - "...His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace." (1:13-15)..." -- These are the feet of God. As we discussed in chapter 1 verse 15, the courtyard of the Tabernacle included an Altar of Burnt Offering, overlaid with bronze and with utensils of bronze (Exodus 27:1-8 / 38:1-5). It was here the offerings of Israel were made to the Lord for atonement of the people's sins (Leviticus 1:1-9). It was also here that God consumed the offering as an aroma pleasing to Him. This atonement was a judgment. The people's actions were often sinful - just as we are - and their atonement to avoid eternal death was through an unblemished offering to God. Similarly, Christ, the Spotless Lamb, became the final unblemished offering of atonement for our sin. (Exodus 12:21-23 / Philippians 2:8). But in the end-times view of Christ in Revelation final judgment has come. His church will be raptured and tribulation will begin. It is now that the feet of Christ, bronze like the altar will bring crushing judgment on all creation as God "...placed all things under His feet..." and makes "...your enemies a footstool for your feet." (Hebrews 1:13 / 10:13 / Psalms 110:1). --- This is the warning to Thyatira. Jesus sees and knows all they do, and unless they repent He is ready to stamp-out their evil with holy judgment.

19. "I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first."

19a.- As we saw with the church at Ephesus Jesus commends the Thyatiran church for their actions (deeds) and ministry (service); and recognizes the fact their faith has persevered through whatever trials they have endured. In fact, Jesus cites the fact their faith and service is growing because they are "...now doing more than you did at first...". As with Ephesus, Thyatira is a doing, going,

growing church. But there is a key difference between the faith of Ephesus and the faith of Thyatira. Thyatira still has their love for Jesus. In their focus on "doing" Ephesus lost their focus on "loving". As a result, their efforts were commendable until you realize they were so distracted by their zeal to do things that they had lost their love for the Lord. Not so with Thyatira. They have a combination of "...love and faith...". They are doing deeds and turning those deeds into service, which is another way of saying they were serving, ministering, and reaching out. All while showing their love of Jesus.

Given that, they would appear to be a church on fire for the Lord. That is until you hear.....
20. "Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds."

Wow. No matter how faithful, loving and growing the church was, this is an amazingly stern and threatening condemnation.

20. - "Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

20a. - To illustrate Thyatira's sinful fall Jesus uses the example of Jezebel.", the pagan daughter of the Phoenician king Ethbaal ["baal is alive] of Tyre who married Ahab, the evil king of Israel (1 Kings 16:29-33). She was an evil queen. Raised in the home of her father; a king and priest of the pagan god melqart and astarte, she brought idolatry and immorality into God's chosen nation. Ahab supported her by building altars and temples to baal and asherah while Jezebel "...was killing off the Lord's prophets..." (18:4). In fact, Ahab was so disobedient that he "...did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than did all of the kings of Israel before him." (1 Kings 16:33). This introduced Israel to extreme immorality and pagan worship, luring many Israelites into sin. That was until she met the prophet Elijah who had been sent by God to bring judgment upon Israel. In an amazing story of God's grace and judgment Elijah confronts 850 pagan priests of Jezebel and watched as the Lord destroyed their altar by fire. Then the people of Israel "...fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord - He is God! The Lord - He is God!'" (1 Kings 18:39). Later Ahab was killed at the battle of Ramoth Gilead. Jezebel was executed by Jehu who had her thrown out of a window, trampled by horses and eaten by dogs. (2 Kings 9:10 / 30-37).

20b. - I tell you all of that to help us understand the seriousness of Jesus comparing the church at Thyatira with the infamous Jezebel. No doubt what the church was doing was evil in the eyes of God. Obviously the church had a woman who brought idolatry and immorality into the church. Idolatry so vile that in verse 24 Jesus calls her teaching "...satan's so-called deep secrets..." So much so, that Jesus compares her sin to that of Jezebel. A story most Jews and many converted Gentiles would know. A story that ended in her destruction by God. This reminder would alert them to their own fate if they did not repent. But the sin of the church was not her actions. Their

sin was the fact they tolerated her and allowed her to have a key leadership role from which she could spread her immorality. The fact they allowed a teacher to bring false teaching into the body resulted in members of the congregation being led into "...sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols...", both indications of how deeply they had drifted into idolatry. In this they had no excuse. The scriptures were very clear about idolatry in general and specifically about the sin of eating food used as an offering to a false god "Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when the prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat of their sacrifices." (Exodus 34:15). This was emphasized by the Jerusalem Council who wrote a letter to the church at Antioch clarifying that Gentile believers did not have to recognize Jewish law – but in doing so they still warned them "You are to sustain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality." (Acts 15:29). The exact sins the church at Thyatira as committing.

21. - "I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." --- Even in her extreme sin Jesus shows the mercy of God and delays judgment to give her (and her followers) time to repent and be saved. Sadly, like Jezebel she was unwilling to repent and that sealed her (their) fate.

22. - "So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways." --- Here Jesus further clarifies His intended judgment. He will bring upon her and those who follow her severe suffering and sickness.

23. - "I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds." --- He will then strike dead members of the church who followed her teaching. In doing so "...all of the churches..." (over) time will hear about what happened and be alert that God watches everything they do and think. This is the same desire of Elijah the prophet when he sought God's intervention for the sin of Israel resulting from the influence of Jezebel - "O Lord, answer me, so that these people will know that you, O Lord, are God..." (1 Kings 18:37).

24. "Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned satan's so-called deep secrets, I will not impose any other burden on you." -- Jesus encourages the faithful. Certainly things would be confusing when the false teacher and disobedient members of the church began to die, so Jesus lets them know they will be spared.

25. "...except to hold on to what you have until I come..." -- Here He speaks to more than the church at Thyatira. He speaks to the church through time to be faithful through trial, persecution and false teaching until "...in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:52). This is the Rapture. The time when believers will be "...caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:17). What a beautiful promise for the faithful.

26. "To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations..." --- During the Millennium Kingdom when Christ reigns on earth, those of us who are believers in Him will "...reign with Christ a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4).

27. "...that one will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery..." -- just as I have received authority from my Father." --- After His Second Coming Jesus will destroy all evil and all evil doers "With justice He judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on His heads are many crowns." (Rev. 19:11-12). This is Jesus the divine Judge who as a son of Israel "...will rule all the nations with an iron scepter..." (Revelation 12:5 / 19:15).

28. "I will also give one the morning star." - What a wonderfully beautiful gift. The gift of Jesus given to all who believe.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." (Revelation 22:16).

"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." (Numbers 24:17).

29. "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." -- Pay attention. He is saying this to all of the church.

The sin of Thyatira is a sin that still exists today, and probably more than at any time in history. This was a faithful church. Loving, doing, persevering and ministering. Yet they had allowed false doctrine to ease its way in. Doctrine so vile that Jesus compares it to the idolatry of Jezebel. Could this happen to us? Sure it could; and very easily. I suspect the woman teacher didn't come into the church announcing her intentions of teaching demonic doctrine [which is teaching anything that is not wholly Biblical]. Instead, it probably started small and grew as more people became tolerant. Sadly, a large portion of people in the American church today don't read, study or seek to understand the Bible. As a result, many are not able to tell truth from deception. They listen only to what comes from the pulpit or classroom and blindly assume it is correct. --- Our defense? We must be alert and stay daily in God's word.

LESSON 15

Revelation chapter 3:1-6

The Church of Sardis

Touch Point:

In chapter 1 Jesus promised a blessing to those who read, hear and study the book of Revelation (1:3). As we've worked our way through chapters 1 and 2 we've already started to see some of these blessings emerge through:

- An expanded understanding of the divine character of Jesus.
- An understanding of the church's failures over time that we need to avoid.
- A heightened awareness (a revealing) of how God's prophetic message can be seen in world events around us today.

If you'll recall from our study of Luke 21 (Matthew 24 and Mark 13) Jesus said --- "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know its desolation is near." (Luke 21:20). Prior to this Jesus had also said "...the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side." (Luke 19:43). This is similar to an earlier warning in Isaiah 29:3 - "I will encamp against you all around; I will encircle you with towers and set up my siege works against you." --- Of course a prediction that Israel would be attacked by their enemies could apply to many events over the centuries and to events happening today (2 Kings 25:1 / Ezekiel 4:1-3 / Daniel 1:1). That said, we must be careful not to overreact to world events, but allow them to keep us alert to how circumstances and events point to the Bible's end-time prophecies. For example, the prior Major General of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, Hossein Salami stated, "This sinister regime [Israel] must be wiped off the map, and this is no longer a dream but it is an achievable goal...Iran has encircled Israel from all four sides. Nothing will be left of Israel." -- This presents an interesting comparison between what Jesus said --- "...when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know its desolation is near...", and the quote from the Iranian General --- "...Iran has encircled Israel from all four sides. Nothing will be left of Israel."

Now we can't say with certainty that Salami's comment is the fulfillment of Luke 21:20, but...based on our study of end-times prophecy in Revelation, we can now appreciate how a comment like this fits within the larger context of events yet to come. But we must also remember that Jesus reassured us - "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come." (Mark 13:7). --- And as we, His children say, -- "Amen, Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20).

Overview:

Traveling southeast from Thyatira we come to the wealthy city of Sardis (modern day Sartmustafa). Located high on a hill 1,500 feet above the Pactolus River it is well fortified and protected. The capital of the Lydian Empire, Sardis was one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor. It was a commercial center for the carpet industry and specialized in the production, dying and weaving of fine quality wool. But more importantly its region held gold

and silver deposits which made it a very wealthy city, and possibly the first city to mint coins. The famous author Aesop of fable-fame was from here.

Pagan religion abounded in Sardis and focused primary on emperor worship or the Artemis/Diana cult. This combination inundated the culture with the worship of man plus lewd and immoral practices. Their temple to Diana was one of the largest in the ancient world; being twice the size of the Parthenon in Athens. Yet Sardis was also home to one of the largest synagogues in Asia. Interestingly, the remains of the synagogue have been uncovered in the center of the city instead of on the fringes as is normally found. This may indicate the Jewish population was influential in society and in the commercial aspects of the region. So now let's read the letter from Jesus to the church at Sardis. The church of the dead.

From a hedonistic perspective their city was one of the best, but from a spiritual perspective their church was one of the worst.

Chapter 3 -- 1. "These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. 3. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. 4. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and His angels. 6. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Breaking it down:

1. "These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."

1a. - The letter to Sardis is short - just six verses - but it cuts to the quick. Typically Jesus provided each church with a commendation for what they were doing well, and then a condemnation to point out their failures. In contrast, the church at Smyrna had no condemnation, but condemnation is all that Sardis gets. There is nothing good to be said.

1b. "These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." --- In chapter 1 we talked about the term "...seven spirits...". There are several possible meanings, but most likely it speaks to the character of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2, where He is described as the Spirit with seven characteristics: (1) being of the Lord, (2) wisdom, (3) understanding, (4) counsel, (5) might, (6) knowledge and (7) fear of the Lord. Of course the seven stars are the seven messengers or pastors of each church. (Revelation 1:20).

1c. "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive...". -- What is a "reputation"? It's the character or perception of a person, or in this case a group of people, for what they have done in the past. A reputation is built over time as a reflection of what has or has not been accomplished.

In the case of Sardis Jesus points out the fact they have a reputation (history) of being spiritually "alive".

1d. "...but you are dead...". But now they are not alive. They are spiritually dead, unrepentant and lost. To be saved is to be spiritually alive; born again and living faithfully by the blood of Christ. But to be lost is to be spiritually dead and without Jesus. And carrying that one step further, if you're without Jesus then you're following satan; even if you don't realize it -- "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." (Ephesians 2:1-2). This puts the church in a place of spiritual paralysis because "...faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:17 / 26). -- Here we begin to see a pattern. The church at Ephesus was faithful and hard-working but had lost their love for Jesus. The church at Pergamum had allowed sin to infiltrate from outside, and the church of Thyatira had become tolerant of sin from the inside. The church of Sardis had probably gone through all of those phases and was now dead.

2. "Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God."

2a. "Wake up!" - "...Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Ephesians 5:14) - "How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? (Proverbs 6:9) -- Here Jesus gives a stern command - Wake up! Open your eyes to what is happening to you. "Be alert and of sober [wide awake] mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8). Why is it so important to be alert? Because, a faithful church will always be a target for the enemy, and like we've discussed before, if the enemy can't conquer you he will corrupt you. It's so easy for a prospering church to get comfortable. But if they're not careful people in comfort can become complacent, and then it's just a short journey to slumber and sleep. It is at that point they fall into spiritual death and are no longer alert to the enemy's attacks. As Paul reminds us, "...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world..." (Ephesians 6:12). This is what Jesus is talking about. Wake up! Get up! Armor up!, and be obedient to God.

2b. "Strengthen what remains and is about to die...". -- There is a vestige of faith remaining within the body. Their spiritual muscles have atrophied, their vision is gone, their faith is nearly nonexistent, but there remains a faint heartbeat. A heartbeat that can be saved if they will simply return to their love for Jesus.

2c. "...for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God." -- Obviously at some point this was a faithful church, but their deeds, service, ministry and efforts have all but stopped. That means their work is undone, unfinished and incomplete. Unlike the church at Smyrna who was "...faithful, even to the point of death...", and as a result, "...I will give you life as your victor's crown." (Revelation 2:10), the church at Sardis had let their light grow dim and their service wane to the point of spiritual death. Yet the grace of God shines through in a last-ditch effort to get their attention and bring them back to faith in Him --- Jesus, who is the Way and who is the Truth, from which they will get the opposite of death. They will get a new life. (John 14:6).

3. "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."

3a. "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard..." -- In James chapter 1, God reminds us to "...not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." "...not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it..." (James 1:22 / 25). Obviously the church had Sardis has received the gospel and heard [listened] it, but now their nearly dead ears no longer hear. Now Jesus implores them to "remember" to recall from their obedient past the truth they used to know so well.

3b. "...hold it fast, and repent..."

- To "hold fast" is to grip something and secure it with strength. Like grasping a ladder rung or a safety rope in a dangerous situation. You don't simple hold it, but you make it is "fast", secure and solid.
- "Repent" - the ultimate command, because it is only through repentance of sin that we may be saved. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matthew 3:2). "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." (Luke 17:3). "But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:3).

3c. "But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you." -- When does a thief usually come? At night. When you are asleep and not alert. This is what Jesus is saying. If you do not wake up, become alert and watch over your church I will come when you least expect it and take you out.

4. "Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy."

4a. "Yet you have a few people..." -- This is arguably the only commendation in the entire letter, although it's not much of a compliment to be told by God that your once vibrant church only has a few people left who are faithful.

4b. "...who have not soiled their clothes..." - To me this speaks to the depth and filth of their sin. Soiling their clothes is much more than just getting dirty. Soiling represents deep sin, rubbed in, the stain on a life or a church which in this case is the sin of spiritual apathy and laziness. But Jude gives them hope by reminding the faithful few that the gospel will "...snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear - hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh." (Jude 23). Instead of soiled clothing Jesus is identifying those who "...put on righteousness as my clothing..." (Job 29:14) - "May your priests be clothed in righteousness..." (Psalms 132:9) - "Rather, clothe yourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 13:14).

4c. "They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy..." -- As Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden (Genesis 3:8)...", so too will we be with the Lord in His new creation (Revelation 21:3). At that point the gathered church will be dressed in white (Revelation 7:14 1 22:14) having been washed in the blood of the lamb (Revelation 22:14). The term "worthy" does not mean they have somehow earned their salvation, but it means they are washed in the blood of righteousness. He is speaking of the redeemed church, His bride, who has "...made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear..." (Revelation 119:7-8) -- His "...chosen

people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." (1 Peter 2:9).

5. "The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and His angels."

5a. The victorious are the overcomers - "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith..." "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." (1 John 5:4-5).

5b. "I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life..." - A most amazing promise. For those of us who have accepted Christ our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 13:8), and nothing or no one will ever erase it.

6. "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." --- One last call; Pay attention.

The story of Sardis is sad. A church who was obviously vibrant at one time but is now on the verge of spiritual death. Could this happen today? Could it happen to our church? Absolutely. Just like the church of Ephesus any church can become so busy and so serving that Jesus is no longer their focus. Oh they know about Jesus. They talk about Him, they sing about Him, and they do things for Him. But if a church is not careful a church can become so focused on the things they do, they lose track of the One they love. The example of Sardis is a church who went through the stages of busyness, growth and confidence, until their comfort and complacency eventually brought spiritual death. That's why I was so excited when our Pastor shared his vision our church -- "To Know Jesus and to Make Him Known." If we truly seek to "know" Jesus then comfort and complacency will no longer be in our vocabulary and spiritual death will be whisked away.

LESSON 16

Revelation chapter 3:7-13

The Church at Philadelphia

Overview:

About 30 miles southeast of Sardis we come to the city of Philadelphia (modern day Alashehir). Located on the Gediz River in the region of Manisa it was founded in 190 BC by the Pergamon king Eumenes Attalus (197-160 BC), who named the city after his brother and successor Attalus II Philometer; a name that means “One who loves his brother”. This is the reason why the American city of Philadelphia also became known as the “City of Brotherly Love”. Attalus II had a son, Attalus III, who having no heirs bequeathed the city to Rome at his death. As a sign of his gratitude the Roman emperor Tiberius relieved the city of paying taxes. Like the other cities of Revelation Philadelphia was located on the Imperial Post Road which enabled it to become a key center of commerce and trade. Lastly, like many other cities, Philadelphia worshiped the Roman ruler of the time and also the standard fare of mythical gods. Today, modern Alashehir is predominantly muslim and home to 45 mosques.

So now let's read the letter from Jesus to the church at Philadelphia. The faithful church.

7. “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the keys of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open. 8. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9. I will make those who are of the synagogue of satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”.

Now, let's break it down:

7. “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the keys of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.”

- With the exception of Smyrna and Philadelphia the letters from Christ to the other churches include condemnation, and their introductions from Jesus indicate displeasure and coming judgment. To Pergamum Jesus is seen as “...him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.” (2:12), and to Thyatira He is Him whose “...eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.” (2:18). But to the faithful church at Philadelphia He brings words of encouragement and promise. Words that will sustain them with the knowledge that our all-

holy God loves them and is pleased with their faithfulness. In doing so Jesus recognizes them as an obedient church of fundamental believers who will inherit the kingdom of God (Revelation 21:7).

7a – “These are the words of Him who is holy...”

These are the words of Christ in His fully divine nature. He is confirming that He, as God, is all righteous and all holy.

- He is, “...the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24)
- He is – “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty...” (Revelation 4:8)
- Who is our – “...Sovereign Lord, holy and true” (Revelation 6:10 / 15:3 / 16:7 / 19:2)
- Who is – “...majestic in holiness, awesome in glory...” (Exodus 15:11)
- Because – “He is a holy God; He is a jealous God. (Joshua 24:19)
- And – “There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.” (1 Samuel 2:2)
- Because He is – “...holy and awesome is his name.” (Psalms 111:9)

This introduction would have been very encouraging to a faithful church by reminding them of the holiness of our God. It would have also brought strength to a church who as obedient Christ-followers knew they were expected to “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16), who were “...chosen by God and precious to Him”...,”...a royal priesthood...”,”...a holy nation...” (1 Peter 2:4,5,9). Unlike other introductions that pointed to displeasure and judgment, this would have comforted the church at Philadelphia because unlike their pagan neighbors, they did not worship human rulers or mythical idols, but worshiped the all holy, Almighty God; a God who found favor in them. --- O, that He may find the same in us!

7b. “... and true...”. – Although Jesus is the way, and the “truth” and the life (John 14:6), I believe the use of the word “true” in this case is more from the perspective of being authentic and genuine. Like someone who is “true blue”, or a survey line that is “level and true”, or a compass heading that is “true north”. This is affirmation from Jesus that He is wholly authentic Lord, the genuine Messiah, the true Son of God. This too would have been very encouraging to the church. Particularly when they read deeper into their copy of John’s revelation to see believers [the church] singing songs in praise to Jesus who is “...Just and true...” (Revelation 15:3 / 16:7 / 19:2).

7c. “...who holds the keys of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.” --- In Isaiah 22:20-24 we find the story of Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, who replaced Shebna as Israel’s chief steward. In this role he held the keys of authority; possibly to the royal palace or treasury. – Using the example of Eliakim the Lord provides a prophetic message of Jesus – “I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open.” (Isaiah 22:20-22). How does this apply to Jesus? In Isaiah 9:6 we are told “For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders.” – This is clearly a Messianic prophecy of Christ and points to His ultimate authority to open and close the door of heaven and the door of hell. – “And I hold the keys of death and Hades.” (Revelation 1:18 / 20:1). This reinforces the supreme authority of Christ for whom God established a royal throne in the house of David – “...and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever...” (2 Samuel 7:13). – “...a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, for the footstool of our God.” (1 Chronicles 28:2). As Jesus, the Son of

Man, He was also the "...son of David..." (Matthew 1:1) because God had chosen the lineage of king David as the human birthright of the Messiah (Matthew 9:27). What an encouragement to know that our Lord, the Holy One, the Messiah, with all sovereign authority holds the keys to heaven, a door no one but Him can open --- and He opens it for us.

8. "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name..."

8a "See, I have placed before you..." – This is the freely offered grace of God.

- "See" – Jesus makes it visible.
- "I have placed before you..." – He brings the gift of grace to them. He places it before them. He doesn't require them to work for it or earn it. He brings it to them as a gift that can be accepted.

8b. "...an open door that no one can shut." – The grace of God is offered to all through the sacrificial atonement of Jesus (John 3:17). Once we accept the Christ-given gift of God's grace and receive His salvation no one can take it away. – "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14). The "gate" is the "...open door..." to "the city", to God's kingdom; open to all if they will accept what Christ has placed before them (Revelation 21:25). And we must always remember that the door to heaven, to eternal life, can only be entered through one way – "So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep." (John 10:7).

8c. "I know you have little strength..." – Obviously this church was spiritually strong, so maybe "little strength" means a small church. Even strength the size of a mustard seed could move a mountain (Matthew 17:20).

8d. "...yet you have kept my word..." --- Jesus is the word (John 1:1-14), but to be faithful to Him we must keep His commands, because "We know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commands." (1 John 2:3). This was emphasized by Jesus "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me." (John 14:21 // 15:10). Obviously this church studied, understood and followed scripture. They "kept" it; held it close and captive in their hearts.

8e. And as a result they "...have not denied my name." – No matter what circumstances or trial the church had to endure they never denied Jesus as their Lord. - "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32). "That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow..." (Philippians 2:10). The name of Jesus is all holy. It is the name in which we pray (John 14:13), it is the name we proclaim above all others (Psalms 105:1), it is a name we can never deny (Matthew 26:35). The fact Philadelphia did not renounce the name of Jesus is testimony to their faithfulness.

9. "I will make those who are of the synagogue of satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you."

9a. "I will make those who are of the synagogue of satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars..." – In His letter to the church at Smyrna (the only other faithful church) Jesus mentions the same or similar group; "I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and

are not, but are a synagogue of satan..." (Revelation. 2:9). God chose Jews [Israel] to be His messengers. It was Israel who should have quickly recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but instead they denied Him and crucified Him. By rejected the Messiah they de-facto sided with satan. "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit [salvation] not by the written code." (Romans 2:28-29). Given the fact Jews are mentioned in both Smyrna and Philadelphia may indicate they were a source of persecution, and may have also been a source of deception through groups such as the Judaizers.

9b. "I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you." - -- To bow down is a sign of humility or defeat. But, to bow down is also a sign of worship. The fact that Gentiles were being saved resulted in jealousy among the Jews. As Paul said, "I take pride in my ministry in hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them." (Romans 11:13-14). At the end of the tribulation the remnant of Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26) but not before they go through great persecution and finally recognize Jesus as Lord - "...and gave glory to God in heaven." (Revelation 11:13). - "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child." (Zechariah 12:10). This is the prophetic point when the final remnant of Israel will see Jesus for who He is - their holy Messiah and King, and bow before Him, broken in the knowledge of what they have done. "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." (Zechariah 13:1). The fact that Jews are bowed down and recognizing God's love for the church is indication of their acceptance of His saving grace for their remnant.

10. "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."

We will go into much more detail about this in later chapters, but to me this verse points to a Pre-Tribulational Rapture. As we will see, mention of the "church" ends in chapter 3 and we are possibly symbolized starting in chapter 4 as the twenty-four elders in heaven. Here in verse 10 Jesus is proclaiming the fact He will "keep you" (prevent you) from the hour of trial the entire world will go through. No event other than the tribulation will be a test of all who live on the earth. The fact that Jesus will keep believers out of this trial means to me they (we) will be removed from the scene before it happens (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

11. "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." --- In several of the letters Jesus said He is coming. To Ephesus He is coming to "...remove your lampstand from its place." (2:5). To Pergamum He is coming to "...fight against them with the sword of my mouth." (2:16). To Sardis He will "...come like a thief in the night." (3:3). But to Philadelphia He is coming with love; admonishing them to hold on to their faith and not waver so as not to lose the crowns they have been rewarded (2:10). It is also a proclamation of what Christ will say in the end. "Behold, I am coming soon!" Yes, I am coming soon." (Revelation 22:12/20).

12. "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name."

We could literally spend a month on this verse because it is so rich and deep, but for now we'll cover a few salient points.

12a. "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it." -- A pillar is mentioned several times in the Bible. To early Israel God is seen as a Pillar of fire by night or a pillar of cloud by day (Exodus 13:21). It is the Pillar from which the Lord spoke (Exodus 33:9). It is also spoke of by Paul as "...the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15). A pillar is generally thought of as an architectural element; a support lifting the structure high above the foundation – like a temple. Just as the Pillar of God or the pillar as the foundationally true church are a strong support. But later in Revelation John describes the new heaven and points out the fact – "I do not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." (Revelation 21:22). No physical temple is required in the new heaven. God is the temple and being His children we are one with Him – pillars in His kingdom. --- Goodness that's amazing to me.

12b. "I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name." ---- So much could be said about this portion of verse 12. At the Second Coming of Christ (not the Rapture) He will be seen as the all holy God of divine judgment who will make war on all evil and evil doers. He will be called "...Faithful and True...", with eyes like blazing fire and many crowns on His head. He will also have a "...name written on Him that no one knows but He himself." (Revelation 19:11-12). His name is unknown, but it will be the name given to Him as the Warrior King. And according to Revelation 3:12, Jesus will write on us "...the name of my God...", "...and the name of the city of my God...", and "...my new name...". To me this is a sign of ownership. In our changed, incorruptible and imperishable body (1 Corinthians 15:50-54) we will no longer be the person we were on earth, but a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), wholly owned by God. His name written on us, and the holy city's name written on us, seems to show who we eternally are and where we will eternally live (Revelation 21:3).

13. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." --- And as with the other letters - "Pay attention."

Philadelphia is one of only two churches found to be obedient. A church who is faithful, enduring, loving and undenying. A church that will not lose their first love for Jesus. Every other church but Smyrna has some type of issue that merits judgment, but not Philadelphia. It is the church of fundamentally sound doctrine. It is the church of true Christ followers. A church that remains true despite the enemy's influence. It is the church we pray to be. It is the church that is so rare.

LESSON 17

Revelation 3:14-22

The Church at Laodicea

Overview:

Finally we come to Laodicea, the last city on the Imperial Postal Route and the last church spoken to by Jesus. Originally named Diospolis - the City of Zeus - Laodicea is located in the Lycus Valley and became one of the wealthiest cities in Asia Minor. It was known for manufacturing luxurious black wool, a medical school, a famous eye salve and as a center for banking. Unlike its neighboring cities of Hierapolis, famous for its hot springs, and Colossae, known for its clear, cold mountain streams, Laodicea lacked a good water supply and depended on water transported to the city through miles of stone pipe aqueducts. The water had a high mineral content which made it very unhealthy. In fact, even today remains of the pipes can be seen in the ruins that are nearly clogged with mineral deposits. Although Laodicea had a large Jewish population - possibly thousands - it was also a center for the pagan worship of Apollo and Zeus. Despite that, it became home to an early Christian church that was mentioned by Paul in his letter to the church at Colosse (Colossians 4:16).

Now let's see what Jesus has to say to the church at Laodicea. -- The Sickening Church.

14. "To the angel at the church at Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16. So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes so you can see. 19. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in, and eat with that person, and they with me. 21. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on His throne. 22. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Let's break this down:

14. "To the angel at the church at Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."

14a. "...the words of the Amen..." -- The word Amen is often used to indicate recognition of the truth -- as people often do in church when someone declares a truth from God's word. Webster's defines it as a word "Used to express solemn ratification; a hearty approval." --- But in this case Jesus Himself is The Amen. He is the Word (John 1:1-14), He is the Truth (John 14:6), and as such, He is the ultimate recognition and affirmation of God's will and word (Psalms 119:160). In short, He is the ratification of God's truth -- the final Amen. "For no matter how many promises

God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God." (2 Corinthians 1:20).

14b. "...the faithful and true witness..." -- Jesus is faithful to the will of the Father - "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me." (John 6:38). He was also faithful as a witness in presenting the gift of God's grace through His ultimate atoning sacrifice for mankind, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42). And as such He is the "...true witness...." to all of God's plans. "For the works that the Father has given me to finish - the very works that I am doing - testify [witness] that the Father has sent me." (John 5:36).

14c. "...the ruler of God's creation..." - We know from John 1:2 that "Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made." We also know that all creation will be subservient to Him as His footstool (Acts 7:49 / Isaiah 66:1-2 / Matthew 5:35), and that in the end all creation will be destroyed by Him (Revelation 20:11) and created anew (Revelation 21:1). This makes Jesus the ultimate Creator and ruler of all creation.

15. "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!"

15a. "I know your deeds..." - In His letters to all of the other churches Jesus was able to cite some examples of faithfulness. Ephesus was known for hard work and perseverance, Smyrna for faithfulness under persecution, Pergamum for remaining true to His name, Thyatira for love and faith, Sardis for their past reputation and Philadelphia for their obedience in all things. But to Laodicea the Lord recognizes no obedience, no blessings, no efforts, no faith, no perseverance. He says "I know your deeds...", but sadly, there are none to name.

15b. "... that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!" -- Instead of praising them for deeds He admonishes them for having "faith" that is lukewarm; tepid and unquenching. The people in Laodicea would have understood this analogy because their city was known for its poor quality drinking water, piped for miles through an underground and mineral encrusted aqueduct. Unlike their neighbor Hierapolis, with its soothing and medicinal hot springs, or Colossae, with its refreshing cold mountain streams, Laodicea's faith was just like their water - stale and unhealthy. In fact, their faith in Christ was nonexistent. It was neither warm and inviting, cold and rejuvenating, loving and faithful, or joyful and exciting. They were a "church" in name only; a group of non-believers with no true faith in Jesus who hypocritically acted as if they did. Recall again our iconic verse of false salvation (Matthew 7:21-23). These were people who thought they knew Jesus because of their own personal works. Yet Jesus said He did not know them because their works, without faith in Him, were simply filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). I believe this same condition is rampant in the "church" today. There are whole denominations calling themselves "Christians" who believe salvation comes through church liturgy and ceremony, other denominations who focus on salvation through an ecstatic revelation of gifts, denominations who believe God unitarily is in all things, and even denominations who no longer believe Jesus is the Messianic Son of God. These are the modern versions of the unregenerate church of Laodicea.

16. "So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth." --- In today's vernacular we would say "You make me sick." --- That statement, coming from Almighty God is clear indication this is a church of the unredeemed lost. If they were saved but

disobedient Jesus would threaten to discipline them as He did the others, but to spit them out of His mouth is similar to what He says to the unbelievers in Matthew 7:21-23 - "...away from me...". It is a statement that He's had all He can take and is about to expel them as useless, tasteless, stale waste-water.

17. "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'"

17a. "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.'" -- Laodicea was a wealthy city. Their production of fine wool and as a center for banking brought affluence to the people; which obviously included the church. This made them feel self-reliant and dampened any dependence they may have one time had in the Lord. In fact, one of the things they did not need - was Him. This reminds me of the heretical preaching becoming so popular today. The so-called "Prosperity Gospel" or the Prosperity Movement popularized by famous (or is it infamous) "pastors" who falsely proclaim that faith in God can be measured by the blessings of wealth, bigger houses, larger income and good health. According to them, these are supposedly the gifts bestowed by a thankful Lord on His faithful followers. Obviously those "impastors" have never read Revelation and the letter from Jesus to Smyrna praising their perseverance through poverty and persecution. They also do not recognize the state in which Jesus and His appointed followers maintained in society - poor humble men who neither sought nor expected earthly riches from God.

17b. "But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." --- So much could be said about these examples. Beginning in Genesis when Adam and Eve recognized their "nakedness" - their sin - man has been in sin. Through the grace of God and acceptance of Christ as the risen Lord that sin can be forgiven. But in the church of Laodicea, where there appears to be no true salvation, all that's left are the lost - the spiritually blind, naked, poor and pitiful wretchedness of mankind. No redemption intended, no forgiveness requested and no salvation received. This may have been the same condition Paul found in the church at Colossae (about 10 miles away). His letter to them focused on the fact they were influenced by Gnosticism, a heretical belief that salvation came to special people through special higher knowledge. As a result, they did not see Jesus as God. They also embraced Old Testament Jewish laws and observances as part of salvation. Both of these beliefs focused their faith on themselves and not Christ -- which means they denied Christ-alone salvation. This may have been what also happened at Laodicea, because once Paul admonished Colossae for their lack of faith he told them, "After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea (Colossians 4:16). -- Sadly, there are proud, wealthy, growing and vibrant churches today who are exactly like this.

18. "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes so you can see."

18a. "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in fire, so you can become rich;..." -- Because of His divine grace and love Jesus gives them one more opportunity for repentance and implores them to seek Him as their wealth. In doing so they would gain from Him the riches of salvation. Like fine gold faith is perfected in the crucible of fire (1 Peter 1:7). This is God given riches that

are everlasting. The "...treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy..." (Matthew 6:20).

18b. "...and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness;..." --- In contrast to the fine black wool Laodicea was famous for, Jesus implores them to dress in white. The reference to white as a symbol of righteousness is found several times in Revelation. To the dead church of Sardis Jesus promised their faithful few would "...walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy..." (3:4). To the overcomers in heaven He describes them as those who have "...washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb..." (7:14). Jesus returns victorious on a white horse (19:11), and He sits on the great white throne of judgment (20:11). --- Here Jesus is reaching out one more time to wash Laodicea in His blood and make them white with righteousness (Romans 5:19).

18c. "... and salve to put on your eyes so you can see." --- Laodicea was famous for their medical school, and specifically for the treatment of eyes using a salve manufactured in the area. As with the gold and white robes Jesus is offering to open their blinded eyes that they may see His gift of grace. "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness..." (Matthew 6:23). But, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law." (Psalms 119:18). To the church in Ephesus Paul says nearly the exact same thing, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." (Ephesians 1:18).

19. "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent." --- Another admonition to come to Jesus. Another opportunity to turn away from themselves and turn to Jesus. Despite their disobedience and the fact they have no true faith Jesus continues to offer His love.

20. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in, and eat with that person, and they with me."

20a. "Here I am!" - Jesus is here. He is not asking them to come to Him; He has come to them.

20b. "...I stand at the door and knock..." -- Another indication this is a church of nonbelievers. We often think of this verse as speaking of Jesus knocking on the door of our heart (which is fine), but in this context Jesus is knocking on the door of the church. That means He's on the outside. He is not there with them (Matthew 18:20) because they are not gathered in His name. Jesus is not in this church. He is not welcomed and He is not invited. Yet, in His divine love He stands and knocks hoping someone, anyone, will open it. This is the Jesus of love, but as James tells us, if they do not listen and repent they will find out - "The Judge is standing at the door." (James 5:9).

20c. "...If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in, and eat with that person, and they with me." --- A final indication of a truly unregenerate church. Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me." (John 10:27). He also said "...like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when He comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for Him." (Luke 12:36). Sadly, the church at Laodicea does not hear His knock and they do not recognize His voice. That's because they are neither sheep nor servant. They are wretched, poor, pitiful, sinful, self-centered and lost. They are a church of nonbelievers who will not participate in the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9).

21. "To the one who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on His throne."

21a. "To the one who overcomes..." -- Who is the Overcomer? Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33), and as His faithful followers we have become Overcomers (1 John 4:4). We will see this theme throughout Revelation. Here are just a few:

- "To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life..." (2:7),
- "To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna..." (2:17),
- "To him who overcomes,...I will give authority over all nations..." (2:26),
- "To him who overcomes, will thus be clothed in white garments..." (3:5),
- "To him who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God..." (3:12).

21b. "...I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on His throne."--- Jesus said to His disciples "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne [Rev 21:5], you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28). Jesus, who is "...seated at the right hand of God..." (Hebrews 1:3) offers the church the chance to reign with Him (Rev 20:4). In chapter 4 the throne of God is mentioned 19 times. This is symbolic of His ultimate authority. A place He offers the church if they will repent and come to Him.

22. "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." --- Pay attention friends; judgment is coming.

From Acts 19 we know that Paul's ministry in Ephesus caused the gospel to be spread throughout the known world "...so that all the Jews and Gentiles who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." (Acts 19:10). The word spread in all directions through Paul's letters and by word of mouth. This included along the Imperial Postal Route which began in Ephesus and ended seven cities later in Laodicea. Over the centuries the "church" spread out from here across the Mediterranean states, up through Europe, into America, and today it continues to spread to all points of the earth. The seven churches of Revelation are not symbolic. They are real congregations of real people, in real cities, whom God used to spread the gospel. They are also representative of all churches across time and present the character and faith of all gatherings who proclaim to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Yet, just as we see in these seven models, every church today will fall into one or more of the same seven characteristics:

Smyrna and Philadelphia -- Only two of the churches (29%) were faithful and received only praise and no judgment, but the majority were unfaithful in one way or another:

- Ephesus - were sound in doctrine, with deeds and hard work, but they had lost their love for Jesus.
- Pergamum - remained true to the name of Jesus and did not renounce their faith, even under persecution, yet they tolerated the influence of external sin.
- Thyatira - showed love, faith, service and perseverance, but allowed sin to be taught from within.
- Sardis - had a reputation built on past faithfulness but now they were dead.
- Laodicea - lost, blind, wretched nonbelievers - they were nauseating to Jesus.

Do you see a pattern? Ephesus tried so hard but lost their focus on Jesus as the source and reason for their faith. This lack of focus allowed Pergamum to tolerate the pleasure of sin. Sin then grew to the point that Thyatira not only tolerated it but endorsed it. This led to the death of faith in Sardis, and by the time we get to Laodicea they simply had no faith at all.

Peter says when judgment starts it will start in the church, "For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God." (1 Peter 4:17). -- Many may think that the "church" is the last place to see judgment, but as we have seen through the example of these churches, this is where judgment is often needed the most.

LESSON 18

Overview:

In chapter 1 we learned how God used the aged apostle John -- a prisoner of Rome and exile on the Isle of Patmos -- to reveal His plans for the end of times. We also saw the nature and character of Jesus in a way we've rarely seen before. This is a reflection of His role as the divine Judge of all creation. Then in chapters 2 and 3 Jesus presents his revelation through personal letters to each of seven churches in Asia Minor. These were real churches who represent the entire "church age" but who also provide clear examples of how quickly any church can fall away from God's will and suffer severe consequence when they do. Even though the majority of these churches were disobedient, we see through His letters grace-upon-grace poured out one last time as He highlights their failures and offers a plan for redemption. But the message is clear; their disobedience will bring divine judgment.

Chapter 4

Chapters 4 and 5 are transitional and act as a bridge between Christ's message to the church and the start of the Tribulation in chapter 6. Chapter 4 gives us a view into heaven as God makes final preparations for His coming judgment. This will be followed by chapter 5 and a view of Jesus we have never seen before as He accepts the role of divine Judge.

In chapter 1 we learned that Revelation is a view of "...what you have seen [the past], what is now [the present], and what will take place later." [the future] (1:19).

- "What you have seen...", is John's initial vision of the truths Jesus was about to reveal (1:11).
- "...what is now...", are the seven letters from Jesus to the church age believers and pretenders (chapters 2 and 3).
- "...what will take place...", is the second revelation John is about to see (4:2).

What quickly becomes apparent is the shift in focus from the church to future events. Beginning in chapter 4 the church as an entity is not mentioned again -- at least not in the way we saw the church addressed in chapters 1 through 3. As we will now discuss in more detail is the absence of the church is clear indication (at least to me) that the church has been raptured -- and Revelation now begins to focus on Israel and end-times judgment. Why else would the church be the primary focus of the first three chapters and then suddenly not appear on earth for the rest of the book? I believe that's because the church is raptured at a point between chapters 3 and 4 and takes on a new identity.

The word "throne" is mentioned sixteen times in chapters 4 and 5. This represents God's seat of ultimate power, and in doing so symbolizes His almighty, supreme and holy authority. It is this authority, the supremacy over all things, that we now see coming forth to retake His creation from the influence of satan. It is this sovereign authority we will see throughout every chapter of Revelation.

Now in chapter 4 we are given context about what is happening in heaven just prior to God announcing His final verdict on creation.

1. "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the same voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

1a. "After this..." --- After what? After the message of Jesus to the seven churches. Jesus has already told John "What you have seen..." (chapter 1) and through the seven letters "...what is now...", (chapters 2-3), so "After this..." will describe "...what will take place..." in the future.

1b. "...and there before me was a door standing open..." --- The door was "before" John (presented to him) and was already "standing" open in heaven. This is a door into heaven. Into the very throne room of God. It was already "standing" open - a welcoming and inviting sight - that is opened to anyone who seeks Jesus (Matthew 7:7) and has faith in Him (Acts 14:27).

1c. "...in heaven..." --- Here John is given his first view into heaven. A view previously given to a few others. Paul was "...caught up to paradise...", where he, "...heard inexpressible things...", and yet was, "...not permitted to tell..." what he saw (2 Corinthians 12:2-5). Isaiah was given a view of heaven; describing some of what he saw in the throne room of God (Isaiah 6:1-13), Ezekiel beheld an amazing vision from God that as we will later see that links directly to what John saw (Ezekiel 1:1), and as we'll discuss in more detail in later chapters, the prophet Daniel was given a vision of heaven and saw many of the same things seen by John. But now John is given a unique view not only into heaven, but into the events that will take place between that point, the end of times as we know it, and the eventual renewal of all of God's creation. Through this door he is given the full revelation of God. This is more than just a mental "vision". By the power of God, John is able to experience events that will occur in another time and place, and to do so as if, or because, he is actually there. We don't really understand how God made this possible, but we must accept with faith the events as written and seek to understand them. This seeking, the very effort of digging deeply into some of the Bible's most complex scripture, is the core of the blessing we will receive through this study (1:3).

1d. "And the voice I first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said,..." - In chapter 1 John's initial encounter with the pre-judgment Jesus began with "...a loud voice like a trumpet..." (1:10), and "...like the sound of rushing waters..." (1:15). This is the voice of God; clear and brilliant in its proclamation.

- "For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
- "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)
- "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast." (Exodus 19:16).
- "And in that day a trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem..." (Isaiah 27:13).
- "Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their head." (Ezekiel 33:5).

- "And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds..." (Matthew 24:31).

This is what John heard; the commanding all-powerful voice of Jesus.

1e. "...Come up here...", --- As discussed, some view this command "...Come up here..." as the Rapture call of the Lord. As if God is calling John and all believers into heaven through the open door. It doesn't speak to me that way. At the Rapture Jesus will come to us and we will be "...caught up together with them [those who have already died] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Clearly Jesus is not calling us into heaven. He is coming down to gather us to Him and take us into heaven. I believe this call to John was simply that -- Jesus calling John to heaven to show him the revelation of what is to come.

1f. "...and I will show you what must take place after this." --- Again, Jesus uses the term "...after this...", to identify things yet (after) to come. The things He will now "show" John.

2. "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it."

2a. "At once I was in the Spirit..." -- Several times John is "...in the Spirit..." (1:10, 4:2, 17:3, 21:10), as he is supernaturally enabled to experience the events Jesus wants him to see.

2b. "...and there before me..." - John emerges into the throne room of God.

2c. "...was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it." -- Throughout the Bible God's supreme authority is symbolized by His throne. -- "God reigns over the nations; God is seated on His holy throne." (Psalms 47:8). This is the throne, the emblem of God's divine holiness, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple." (Isaiah 6:1). This is a heavenly throne (Psalms 11:4); a throne that will last forever (Psalms 45:6). Mentioned several times in Revelation, the throne is the seat of God's almighty power (Revelation 7:15, 16:17-18), but I think it lessens its true meaning to view it as a piece of furniture. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us "This is what the Lord says: Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool." (Isaiah 66:1). The throne of God sits in the temple of God (Revelation 7:15), which makes it a place of worship. But through the example of the New Jerusalem we come to understand that the temple is not a building but is the power and holiness of God. - "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." (Revelation 21:22). In seeing His throne, John is seeing the power and supremacy of our all holy God.

2d. "...with someone sitting on it..." -- We know from chapter 5 who the "someone" is; "Then I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne..." (5:1). This is God the Father whose mighty right hand is seen throughout scripture as a sign of His power - "Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy." (Exodus 15:6). "Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand..." (Psalms 17:7). "You gave me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great." (Psalms 18:35). It is God the Father on the throne preparing to task God the Son with His assignment to bring judgment upon all creation.

3. "And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircling the throne." --- The naming of these precious stones expresses the beauty of what John saw. Similar to what Ezekiel saw "Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire..." (Ezekiel 1:26). Since God the Father cannot be seen (John 1:18), but "...lives in unapproachable light..." (1 Timothy 6:16), John is describing what he sees in the only way he knows how; by comparing it to the most precious and beautiful jewels he can imagine. The rainbow, like the one also seen by Ezekiel (1:28) may testify to the eternal promises of God. (Genesis 9:12-17).

Chapter 4 begins a transition from a message to the church to the preparations required for the coming judgment. Next we'll study verses 4-11 and begin to see new characters who play a key role in coming events.

LESSON 19

Revelation, Chapter 4 verse 4

Chapters 4 and 5 provide fundamentals we need to understand. Verses 4 and 6 are prime examples of complex and hotly debated topics we must try to understand so we're not confused later. I must confess that chapter 4 is difficult because I've come to the conclusion there is no way I can adequately explain the hundreds of verses I read as I research each chapter. That leaves me with hitting the high spots with as much information as I can.

Overview:

Our prior lesson focused on chapter 4 verses 1-3. At this point Jesus begins to transition from His message to the church (chapters 1-3) to His preparations for tribulation and judgment. Beginning in chapter 4 the "church" as an entity is not mentioned again, leading many conservative scholars to believe this indicates the Rapture has occurred. We will discuss that in more detail between chapters 4 and 5.

In the first three verses of chapter 4 John is given a second vision. Entering into God's throne room (representative of His divine authority – Revelation 21:22) he is struck dumbfounded as he tries to express what he sees in the undefinable presence of God. Since God the Father cannot be seen (John 1:18), and "...lives in unapproachable light..." (1 Timothy 6:16), John describes what he sees in the only way he knows how; by comparing it to a heavenly light show of the most precious and beautiful jewels he can imagine.

Now in verse 4 we are introduced to the first of two new characters – the Twenty-four Elders and the Four Living Creatures. These are the first of many others we will meet in our journey through Revelation. In some cases symbolic names like these are used so they are timeless and can be understood by any reader, from any culture and from any time period. Now as we move deeper into Revelation we will better understand who they are and the role they play.

Chapter 4 verse 4

4. "Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.

4a.- So who are the twenty-four elders? The Bible doesn't specifically say, but it's obvious they play an important role because they're mentioned multiple times and they participate in many major events in Revelation. Given that I think it's important for us to understand who they could be.

There are several interpretations of who the Twenty-Four Elders might be:

(1) Some contend they are angels, but I'm not aware of anywhere in the Bible where angels sit, judge or reign. Nor are they cited as sitting with God around His throne. Angels are amazing created beings who perform every service and ministry of God. But...they are not the redeemed creation of God. Jesus did not die for them and angels long for these things that man is offered through God's grace (1 Peter 1:12). God seeks to recreate man to be like Him but He does not do

this for angels. One of their roles is “...ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.” (Hebrews 1:14). ---- As such I don’t believe angels would be in the role of reigning (thrones) with God or of judging men.

(2) The book of Genesis lists twenty-four Old Testament patriarchs from Adam to Abraham (Genesis 5:3-32 and 11:10-27). They broadly represent those who were obedient to God primarily through the pre-Israel generations. In a complex genealogy of human creation Adam is the first of all mankind. Through Him issues multiple branches of man who populated the world. After the flood Noah replenished the earth and begot his own genealogy of both obedient and disobedient. Eventually through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [Israel] became the father of the nation Israel. --- I don’t believe these are the Twenty-Four Elders for a number of reasons – (1) They are not mentioned by either Isaiah, Ezekiel or Daniel in their pre-Rapture view of heaven. (2) Unlike the later redeemed they were not promised to be kings or priests as believers in Jesus are (Revelation 5:9-10 / 1 Peter 2:9), (3) they will not be seated with Christ in heaven (Ephesians 2:6-7), (4) they are not co-heirs of God’s inheritance through the blood of Christ (Galatians 4:4-7), and (5) the writer of Hebrews commends the Patriarchs but then clarifies that “...none of them received what was promised...” (redemption through Christ). So that “God had planned something better for us...” (Hebrews 11:39-40). --- Truly the Patriarchs were great men of God but it does not appear they are the Twenty Four seated on thrones in Revelation.

(3) In 1 Chronicles 25 David “...set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals.” These were 24 men whose task it was to worship God and carry his message (prophecy) through song. --- Although the Twenty-Four elders of Revelation are seen singing and worshiping, nothing would lead us to believe that the 24 Old Testament singers were meant to sit on thrones with God and rule.

(4) King David also divided the Levitical priests into 24 divisions. These were the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses and the original head of the temple priests (Exodus 28:1). It was through the descendants of his sons Eleazar and Ithamar that the groups emerged. These 24 groups were responsible for all temple duties. They existed later in the Old Testament (Nehemiah 10:2-8) and were still mentioned in the time of Jesus (Luke 1:5-9). --- But it’s not clear that these divisions of Levitical priests would take a place with God in heaven

(5) There is also a view the 24 may be the 12 Tribes of Israel plus the 12 Apostles, but why would the Bible repeatedly use the term twenty-four so many times if it was actually 12 plus 12? Jesus said His disciples would sit on thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28), but I don’t believe that would include the redeemed church. I’m also not sure how to count the 12 who will judge. When Jesus said, that He was talking to the original 12. Assuming you discount Judas and add Matthias (13th) you still have 12, but what about Paul? (the 14th?) He professed to be a full apostle, and...he was the Lord’s chosen messenger to the Gentiles, who eventually became the church. Certainly the early church had plenty of converted Jewish members, but it seems to me the ministry of Paul, the focus of his epistles, and his role in planting churches was focused on converting pagans – Gentiles. In fact, it seems that Paul spent a lot of his time battling Jews within or on the outside of the early church because they appear to be the ones bringing in the most false doctrine (Judaizers, Gnostics, “those who call themselves Jews but are not”, etc.). Eventually the “church” became largely Gentile – as it is today. So to me, Jewish Christians (who are still

“Israel”) and the church (primarily Gentiles) are distinctly different, and one does not supplant the other.

The five examples above all relate in some way to Israel. But Israel is not redeemed until the end of the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-3 / Romans 11:25-27 / Jeremiah 31:33-34), when they “...even those who pierced Him” (Revelation 1:7) accept Christ as the true Messiah.

So where does that leave us? Personally I believe Jesus could be speaking to the Elders in chapter 4 as the raptured church because He applies to them some of the same characteristics He attributes to the church in His letters – they are sitting on thrones, clothed in white linen and wearing crowns. There is also a connection between the redeemed in white robes and the Bride (the church). Also, in their song of praise in chapter 5 the Twenty-Four seem to be speaking of the church when they said “...because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (5:9). Obviously, the term Twenty-Four is important and seems to characterize a group of representatives. But in the case of Revelation what are they presenting? Here’s where my heart lands:

The Bible doesn’t tell us specifically who the Twenty-Four are, and as we’ve seen above, there could be several interpretations. But I believe we’re given enough comparative scripture to probably identify them as representatives of the Raptured church. As we discussed last week, the first three chapters in Revelation are written directly to the church, but beginning in chapter 4 the church – in name – is removed. That’s probably because by this point the church has been Raptured and is now represented in heaven by the Twenty-Four church leaders.

Let’s discuss some reasons for this assumption:

4b. – “Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones...”

- To the church at Laodicea Jesus promised a unique reward if they would repent. – “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne...” (Revelation 3:21)
- During the Millennial Reign the church of believers will govern with Jesus, “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.” (Revelation 20:4)

4c. – “...and seated on them were twenty-four elders...” – The word “elder” is often used to designate a leader / pastor / shepherd of the church. In the original Greek several words are used to represent church leaders but the most common is Presbuteros. It is used twenty-eight times in the gospels, epistles and the book of Acts, and twelve times in Revelation. Most often to describe leaders of the New Testament church. In addition, the word Episkopos is used five times to describe an overseer of the church; the primary leader in the case of plurality of leadership. And third, the word Poimen which means shepherd and is sometimes translated as pastor. It is used four times in the New Testament to emphasize one who tends, guides and protects. Whichever word is used they are referring to leaders of the New Testament church. Here are some examples:

- “From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.” (Acts 20:17)
- “This they did by sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.” (Acts 11:30)
- “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church...” (Acts 14:23)
- “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.” (Titus 1:5)

- “So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders...” (Acts 15:2)

Clearly – at least to me – the term elder in Revelation is referring to representatives of the Raptured church.

4d. – “They were dressed in white...” – As we have discussed, being dressed in white is symbolic of the righteous redeemed. In this case they are the redeemed in heaven. We see this in the letter Jesus wrote to the church at Sardis – “Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.” (Rev 3:4-5)

Other verses speaking to the white robes of righteous believers include:

- “...put on righteousness as my clothing...” (Job 29:14),
- “May your priests be clothed in righteousness...” (Psalms 132:9),
- “Rather, clothe yourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ...” (Romans 13:14),
- Jesus, speaking of His bride, the church, says she has “...made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear (Revelation 19:7-8).

4e. – “...and had crowns of gold on their heads.” – To the faithful church at Smyrna Jesus promised “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10).

- In our study of Smyrna we learned that the symbolism of a crown would have been familiar to the early church. In their culture wreathed crowns of garland were often awarded to prominent citizens, those who had accomplished great deeds or victors of athletic competition. But here Jesus is referring to an eternal reward for the overcomers:
- “Blessed is the one who preserves under trial, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).
- “In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:8).

The Twenty-Four Elders seem to have all of the attributes associated with the “church” as described in the letters of Jesus. They are seated on thrones around the Lord, they are dressed in the white of the redeemed and righteousness, and they wear crowns of gold that they will later lay at the feet of Jesus (Revelation 4:10). The fact they are the righteous becomes clear in chapter 5. There we will see the Twenty-Four described as purchased through the blood of Christ from every tribe and language and people and nation. People who are now “...a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:10). These are the same people – the church – described by Peter as “...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” (1 Peter 2:9). This appears to be the church, the body of believers, who are now in John’s vision with Jesus and participating in His preparations for judgment. A preparation they will need because “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is the Lord of lords and King of kings – and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers.” (Revelation 17:14), who are already in heaven. These followers are us – believers in Christ – “The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.” (Revelation 19:14). Thank you Lord.

LESSON 20

Revelation Chapter 4 verses 5-11

Overview:

Last week we discussed the first of many complex characters we'll see in Revelation -- the Twenty-Four Elders. The Bible doesn't specifically say who they are, but to better understand who they might be we reviewed six possible options and settled on (at least in my mind) an understanding that they probably represent the raptured church; seated on thrones (Revelation 3:21 / 4:4), wearing white robes of righteousness (Revelation 3:4-5 / 4:4) and wearing the crowns of victory (Revelation 2:10 / 4:4). Next we'll discuss the second character of Revelation -- the Four Living Creatures. Another group we'll see several times during our journey.

So as a refresher, why is it so important for us to try to understand what the Lord is revealing through this book and its characters?

- First, because Jesus is taking the time to tell us. He told John to write down what he saw and heard and give it to the church (us). To me that means He intends it for us and will help us understand what He wants us to know.
- Second, Jesus promises to bless those who "read" (study on our own), "hear" (what someone else teaches), and "take to heart" (seeking to understand with our heart, not our head) (Revelation 1:3).
- Third, The Lord gives us a beautiful promise when we seek Him --- "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3).
- Lastly, unless we have a basic understanding of key elements of Revelation, and specifically the key characters, we will not understand what is ahead. For example, the Twenty-Four Elders and Four Living Creatures are mentioned numerous times throughout Revelation. Unless we diligently seek to understand who they are we will not understand their role in future events.

Revelation 4:5-11

5. "From the throne came flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God."

5a. "From the throne came flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder....". -- I don't think these are signs of environmental activity in heaven. I think it represents the mood of God. Keep in mind, what John is witnessing in heaven is God's preparation for coming judgment. This would likely put Him in a mood of His coming wrath.

Where else do we see this?

- When God was casting plagues and natural disasters upon the people of Egypt He sent judgment as a hailstorm of such fury that it beat down animals, man and crops in the fields. "When Moses stretched out his staff towards the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail and lightning flashed down to the ground." (Exodus 9:23)
- When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments He did so to provide His law for the governance of His people, which He expected them to follow. Yet God already knew the people would be disobedient and a day of judgment would be the result. He also knew that

when Moses returned with the law the people would have already reverted back to idol worship. So as Moses received the law on Mount Sinai -- "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled." (Exodus 19:16), and --- "...the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled in fear." (Exodus 20:18).

- When king David was delivered from the hand of Saul he wrote one of the most encouraging psalms of praise. As he describes the actions of God who delivered him from defeat we see the mood of God towards David's enemies, "Out of the brightness of His presence clouds advanced with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded..." (Psalms 18:12-13).
- And then in Revelation we see the mood of God as he releases, blasts and pours out cataclysmic judgments upon His sin-tarnished creation and all sources and doers of evil.
- "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." (Revelation 8:5).
- "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within the temple was seen the ark of His covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm." (Revelation 11:19).
- "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake." (Revelation 16:17-18).
- Obviously, the mood in heaven was not a festive one. Instead it reflected preparations for the coming fury of punishment and wrath.

5b. "In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God."

- "...seven lamps...", These may not be the seven lampstands which represent the church (Revelation 1:12 / 1:20), but are seven "blazing" lamps. More like torches as heaven prepares for battle. We see reference to similar symbolism throughout the Bible, including: --- "For Zion's [Israel's] sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch." (Isaiah 62:1) --- "The chariots storm through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightning." (Nahum 2:4).
- "...seven spirits of God." -- In chapter 1 we saw "...the seven spirits before His throne..." (1:4), and we discussed several potential interpretations of who this is. Then in chapter 5 we see Jesus with seven horns (power - Deuteronomy. 33:17) and seven eyes (all seeing) as the seven spirits of God "...sent out into all the earth...". To me this speaks to Isaiah's description of the Holy Spirit who had seven distinct characteristics: (1) being of the Lord, (2) wisdom, (3) understanding, (4) counsel, (5) might, (6) knowledge and (7) fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2). It is the Holy Spirit who functions within believers and who carries God's message to the world. That's the role here in Revelation as He is "...sent out into all the earth..." (John 14:26 / Acts 2:33). I think it's also important to remember the word "seven" can mean "completeness". Such as Jesus' final words to the seven churches, seven horns, seven eyes, a scrolls with seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls.

6. "Also before the throne was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back."

6a. "Also before the throne was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal... -- Much like the description of God's illuminated throne in 4:3 I believe this is how John struggled to describe what he saw; the holy ground on which stood the Lord's throne. This is very similar to what Moses and Aaron saw when they approached God on the mountain to confirm the Book of the Covenant -- "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself." (Exodus 24:9-10). Later in Revelation John describes "...what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire..." (Revelation 15:2). In both cases he is describing what he sees in the best way he can. By comparing it to the beauty of precious jewels.

6b. "...In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back."

- Here we are presented with the second character of Revelation, the Four Living Creatures. As with the Twenty-Four Elders the Bible doesn't tell us who these are but I believe it's safe to say they are special angelic beings, who function close to the throne of God and have a specific role to play in His judgment. We will see them mentioned several times in Revelation. Generally they are leading the worship and praise of God (4:8-11 / 5:8-14 / 7:11 / 19:4), announcing the coming judgments (examples 6:1 / 6:3 / 6:5), and administering the final judgments as we see with the bowls that are the most destructive wrath of God - "Then one of the Four Living Creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever." (Revelation 15:7).

Although the interpretation of their attributes is certainly debatable let's explore what their description might mean:

- "...In the center, around the throne...". I believe being in the center and around God's throne highlights their exalted role to carry out and administer God's commands.
- "...were four living creatures..." -- It would take much more time than we have to adequately interpret who these characters are, so we'll seek a basic understanding with the thought that in the future we may go back for a more in-depth study through Isaiah and Ezekiel. Obviously they are angelic beings with a very important role. We see this in Isaiah's own vision of heaven where he made a valiant effort to describe what he saw - "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory." (Isaiah 6:1-3). Likewise, Ezekiel saw the same or similar beings and devoted two entire chapters to their description (1 and 10). Highlights of his view include: (1) there were four of them, (2) like John, he called them "Four Living Creatures", (3) they had four wings instead of six, (4) each had four faces; a man, an ox, a lion and an eagle, (5) they followed the Holy Spirit, (6) their entire bodies were covered with eyes, (7) each had "wheels" with complex movements and actions. These, like a war chariot may represent the judgment of God.
- "...covered with eyes, in front and in back." -- See (6) above. In their service to God nothing escapes their view.

7. "The first living creature was like a lion, the second like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. - This characteristic was observed by both John and Ezekiel; an angelic being with four different faces. There are several interpretations of what this may symbolize. The Man could signify the intelligence, reasoning and ruling power God gave His human creation, the Ox (Ezekiel called it a Calf) could portray the angels humble service to God, the Lion could mean strength and power; attributes that will be required to accomplish their role in future judgment, and the Eagle may indicate their swiftness to do God's will.

8. "Each of the Four Living Creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under their wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

8a. "...had six wings..." --- Isaiah's description is a little more detailed - "...each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. -- Some interpret this to mean, "...with two wings they covered their faces...", so as not to gaze on the glory of God, "...with two they covered their feet...", in homage to God they show their lowliness, and possible to signify that they go only where He commands, and "...with two they were flying...". Here they are always on the move; never stopping and always ready to accomplish God's will.

8b. "...and was covered with eyes all around, even under their wings..." - See note on verse 6 above. Always alert, always watching, always seeing in their service to God.

8c. "...Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." - Here we see the same song of praise recorded by Isaiah. It proclaims the total holiness of God. Holy, holy, holy is their praise. A praise they never stop saying day and night. It is a continuous praise reserved only for God. The angels do not continuously proclaim His power, or His strength, or His omniscience. That's because these are all captured in the fact that He is All Holy. This is the "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). This is the Lord whom the psalmist exclaims - "Let them praise your great and awesome name - He is holy...."..."...Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool - He is holy..."..."...Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy." (Psalms 99:3/5/9 / Leviticus 11:44-45). -- They say this night and day because we can never overemphasize the absolute holiness of God. It is also this holiness we must never overlook or take for granted. It is this holiness that breaks us over our sin, that brings us to a point of confession and redemption, that causes us to be humble and penitent before our Almighty God.

9 - 11. In closing chapter 4 John again cites the praise of the Twenty-Four Elders and the Four Living Creatures. And as they praise the Twenty-Four Elders recognize that it is God, through His grace and the blood of Jesus, who has brought them to this time and place. They exalt His name, recognizing His glory and power, acknowledging that He is the creator of the world that He is about to destroy, and as they do they remove their crowns -- rewards of their faithfulness -- and lay them at His feet (Revelation 4:10). This signifies that it is God's grace and not their own works to whom they owe their salvation.

What a glorious thing that will be to see.

LESSON 21

Prior to starting chapter 5 we're going to step back and cover one of the most debated topics in the Bible -- the Rapture. You'd think something so beautiful as this would not merit debate --- but it does. Sadly, the debate is not over whether or not the Rapture will occur or how it will occur. The debate is over when it will occur.

So...I plan to provide a high level overview of what the Rapture is, the four most common views of Rapture timing, and how it probably fits into the broader perspective of end-times events; specifically as it relates to the Tribulation. I'll also share which view I personally believe. In doing so I would request we not let this topic cause undue debate in class. We may agree-to-disagree -- which is perfectly fine -- but I don't want it to distract us from the broader focus of our study; which is to better understand the overall revelation of God's end-times plan.

Obviously, it will probably take more than one class to work through this lesson...

There are three topics we'll cover over:

1. What is the Rapture?
2. What is the Tribulation? (we'll go into much more detail between chapters 5 and 6).
3. What are the most commonly held views about when the Rapture will occur relative to the Tribulation?

1. What is the Rapture?

There are several passages of scripture we'll use to better understand what the Rapture is:

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- 1 Corinthians 15:12-58
- Acts 1:11
- John 14:1-4
- Revelation 19:11-16 and 20:4-5

To start with, let's clear-up one thing very quickly -- the Rapture is not the "Second Coming" of Christ. I think many (maybe most?) Christians believe the "Second Coming" of Jesus is when He returns to gather His flock of faithful believers. But if you read Revelation you'll quickly understand that the Second Coming of Christ -- the next time He physically stands on earth (Zechariah 14:4 / Job 19:25), -- is when He returns as the Warrior King and Judge. An event that occurs after the Rapture and the Tribulation. Revelation 19:11-16 describes the post-Tribulation return of Jesus on His white horse - "...whose Rider is called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and wages war." (19:11). And when Jesus returns He has with Him - "The armies of heaven...riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." (19:14). Clearly this is Jesus as the divine Judge, focused on waging war against the source and doers of evil. At this point He is focused on judgment "with" His people, not on the rapturing "of" His people. We know this because this verse also tells who will be with Jesus when He returns -- an army composed of people we have seen before -- an army dressed in white linen. An army that is us:

(1) The faithful in the church at Sardis who if they would accept Jesus were promised - "They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white." (Revelation 3:4-5).

(2) The Twenty-Four Elders "...dressed in white..." (Revelation 4:4), and probably representing the church in heaven.

(3) The bride of Christ (also symbolic of the church) who "... has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear..." (Revelation 19:8).

As we have discussed in prior lessons, these verses and many others that reference people in white linen speak to the righteous and redeemed -- the church. Let's keep that in mind later in this lesson.

So if the return of Jesus to earth for judgment and destruction is the "Second Coming", then what is the Rapture? The word "Rapture" is used to describe a point in the future when Jesus will come to gather His believers and take us to heaven. The purpose of this appearance is not to judge, but to gather. Originally the term came from the Greek word *Harpazo* which basically means "to snatch up" or "to be carried away". During the early to middle ages when the original Greek texts were being translated into Latin (the language most commonly used for legal and religious application through the 17th century), the word *Harpazo* was replaced with the Latin *Rapio*. This word was then translated to Rapture when the biblical Latin texts were translated to English.

The Rapture is reserved for only two groups of people; believers who have already died (and have been with the Lord in spirit since their death) and believers who are still alive at the time the Rapture occurs. In other words, the Rapture is only for true believers in Christ. The rest of humanity will rise during the "second resurrection" (Revelation 20:5 & 11-15), or in the case of the living, will be left behind to suffer through the Tribulation until both groups are sentenced at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:12-13). On the surface this may seem unfair, but remember that by time this occurs God will have spent centuries spreading His truth, sending Himself as a man to cover our sins in His blood, and offering grace upon grace to hundreds of generations. Those who have accepted Christ as the promised Messiah will be "Raptured" to be with the Lord. But those who have failed to accept God's grace through Jesus will be left behind to suffer God's wrath and eternal punishment, with their bodies resurrected at the very end to receive their eternal sentencing (Revelation 20:15).

Paul explained this in his first letter to the early Christians at Thessalonica. As early believers in the days before the New Testament, the church was still learning about their new faith. In this particular situation they worried about what would happen during the Rapture to their family and friends who had been believers but had died. Would they miss the coming of Jesus? What would happen to their bodies? Would they ever see them again? In answering their questions Paul used the opportunity to explain what would happen in terms of the Rapture. We find his explanation in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Paul starts by explaining that those who had gone before are not spiritually "dead". Instead they are "asleep". This does not mean "soul sleep" as some believe. This term is used to help us understand that our spirit (if we are believers in Christ) never "dies" in the earthly sense, but goes to be with Jesus. Further, Paul describes the body of a believer who is physically dead but whose soul lives. In 2 Corinthians 5:1 Paul describes our bodies as our "...earthly tent..." -- a "tent" being a temporary home - but in 1 Thessalonians he adds clarification that believers "...who have fallen asleep in Him" (4:14), are those who truly accepted the gospel; those who "...believe that Jesus died and rose again..." (4:14). So what this really says is, if you are a true believer in Jesus your spirit never "dies". It simply leaves your earthly tent to be with Jesus.

But then Paul tells us something extraordinary. At the Rapture the spirits of believers who have died will be brought back by Jesus and reunited with their bodies. But these will now be bodies that are perfect and renewed. He describes this in 1 Corinthians 15 - "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (15:42-44) --- This renewal of our earthly body to a heavenly body applies to the living as well - "We will not all fall asleep [die], but we will all be changed -- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (15:51-52). So what does all this mean? The spirits of those who have died will go to be with the Lord. At the Rapture they will return with Jesus to be reunited with a perfect body. Then those of us still alive will also be united with Christ and our bodies changed as well. How do we know this? Because Paul says - "The dead in Christ [believers] will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up [Harpazo] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Remember, Jesus said "My Father's house has many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:2-3). Here we see another promise that He will come back to take us -- Harpazo. We are further reminded of this when Jesus ascended to heaven with a promise of His return. - "After this He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as He was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee', they said, 'Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.'" (Acts 1:9-11). So how does this description help us understand the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming? Here in Acts the disciples are told Jesus will come back "...in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven." In other words, in the clouds. He is also referred to as "...this same Jesus..."; the Lord as He was known to His followers. But at the Second Coming we see a different view of Jesus. Here it's obvious He does not return "...in the same way...". Instead, He returns on a war horse, waging war, with eyes like blazing fire, with many crowns on His head, with His robe dipped in blood and a sharp-edged sword coming out of His mouth (Revelation 19:11-16). It seems obvious that this view and character of Jesus is completely different than what we see in Paul's description of the Rapture - "For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Did you catch the second difference in this passage and the one in Revelation 19? Here Jesus does not physically come to earth. He comes down from heaven to command the catching-up of His followers, when we are caught "up" "...in the clouds to meet the Lord..." (4:17). The Lord does not come all the way to earth. Instead, we are caught up to Him in the clouds. Yet in Revelation 19, Jesus comes to earth to fight. Zechariah tells us "...the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as He fights on the day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem..." (Zechariah 14:3-4). In one case Jesus comes in the clouds to Harpazo His people. In the other He comes to earth the second time, and this time He comes all the way to wage war.

In summary -- The Rapture is the point in the biblical timeline when Jesus will come to gather and catch-up His followers to Him. When this occurs all believers will immediately leave the earth. This will undoubtedly set the world on edge because they cannot explain what happened to millions of people who simply vanished. Some will have no idea how to interpret this, but others will certainly think "Why didn't I listen?" We will then go to heaven and will observe the preparation for God's judgment on earth. Later, we will return at the Second Coming as the army of Jesus to wage war on all evil and engage in the establishment of His Millennium Kingdom. Whew! That's a lot in one paragraph, but it will become clearer as we move forward.

And when will this happen? We don't know. Jesus (in His earthly role) told His disciples that even He did not know (Matthew 24:36). Only the Father knew. But as we'll see in Revelation Jesus -- having returned to His holy role of God -- knows and is preparing.

All that said, let's look at the four common views of when the Rapture will occur:

1. Pre-Tribulation Rapture (or "Pre-Trib.")
2. Mid- Tribulation Rapture (or "Mid-Trib.")
3. Pre-Wrath Rapture
4. Post Tribulation Rapture (or "Post-Trib.")

Now let's look at each of these.

LESSON 22

The Timing of the Rapture

Quick recap of what we've learned so far about the Rapture:

- The term "Rapture" comes from the original Greek "Harpazo". This was translated in the early Middle Ages in Latin to "Rapio or Rapere", which was later translated to "Rapture" in English. In its root form it means to "snatch up" or "to be carried away".
- The Rapture is a singular event when Jesus will return to gather His followers and take us to be with Him. When that happens we "...will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord..." (1 Thessalonians 4:17). He promised this in John 14:3 "...I will come back and take you...", and the angels confirmed the event in Acts 1:11 "...This same Jesus...will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven."
- This event will include two groups of people:
 - (1) Those believers who have already died. Their souls have been with Jesus since death -- "...today you will be with me in paradise..." (Luke 23:43), and will return with Him to be united with their new bodies. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 1 Corinthians 15:42-43 / 50-54)
 - (2) Those believers who are still alive will also be transformed into a new body as they are caught up to Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 4:17, 1 Corinthians 15:51)
- Paul tells us why our new bodies are necessary. On earth our soul lives in a temporary "tent" (2 Corinthians 5:1 / 2 Peter 1:13 / Philippians 3:20-21), that has been corrupted by sin. This body will be replaced with an incorruptible body in which our souls will live with the Lord for eternity. (1 Corinthians 15:52-54).
- During the Rapture Jesus does not physically come to the surface of the earth but instead gathers us in the air. We know this because the Bible says - "...the Lord Himself will come down from heaven..." / and we, "...will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). At least in my mind (although as we will see this is often debated) this event is in contrast to Christ's Second Coming (on earth) when He returns at the end of the Tribulation as the Warrior King to Judge creation, and at which time he plants His feet on the Mount of Olives (Revelation 19:11-16 / Zechariah 14:3-4).
- It appears the timing of this event is imminent. In his own lifetime Paul certainly speaks to it as if it could happen at any moment "...while we wait for the blessed hope - the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13)

Now, given this background to help us better understand what the Rapture is, let's talk about the various opinions of when the Rapture will occur. ----- Fair warning, this is a hotly debated theological topic, so let's try to steer clear of that in class. ----- Instead, study the word, pray for clarity and let God lead your heart. Also, each of these opinions require significantly more study than we have time for now to fully understand the differences. So what I propose we do is review the most commonly held views at a high level, discuss each one, and then you can come to your own prayerful position. That said, I believe I need to tell you which view I hold to. By doing so you'll know where I stand and why. I don't want that to sway your study but I don't believe it would be right to present various views and then not tell you which one I lean towards. --- Frankly, I used to think it didn't matter when these events occurred. However and whenever God decided to do these things was fine with me, plus there was nothing I could do to change it or control it. But then God laid on my heart that it is very important. If He took the time to write it down, and

if He promised us a blessing from reading it, hearing it and understand it, then it is our job to do as He asks.

Before we try to align the Rapture with the Tribulation, let's quickly review what the Tribulation is. We'll spend more time on this before we begin chapter 6, but here's the Cliff Notes version to give us a high level understanding....

The "Tribulation" is a seven year period of time described in Revelation chapters 6 through 19. It is a span of time often called "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel," which is focused specifically on Israel - "Seventy sevens are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place (Daniel 9:24). Each "week" of this period is symbolic of a seven-year span of time. Therefore, the seventy "week" period is actually seventy segments of seven years each, or 490 years. This begins with the decree issued by the Persian king Artaxerxes in 445BC giving the captive Jews permission to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24-26 / Nehemiah 2:1-8). The first 483 years -- sixty-nine of the seventy weeks -- ends at the crucifixion of Christ (Daniel 9:26). This leaves one remaining period of seven years, which is the final "week". So when will the final and seventieth week occur? We don't know, but we know it comes at the end of the church-age and is the seven years called the "Tribulation". A period of time also called "The Time of Jacob's Troubles" (Jacob being Israel - Jeremiah 30:7). A time when Israel and the world come under severe judgment, from which Israel eventually turns to God and recognizes Jesus as the true Messiah, and the remnant of the unbelieving world and creation itself is destroyed. The seventieth week, the Tribulation, is divided into two 3-1/2 year periods. Specific events occur during each of the 3-1/2 year segments with the second 3-1/2 period often called the "Great Tribulation" when God blasts and pours final destruction upon all creation. The term "...time, times and half a time...", is another way of describing the 3-1/2 year point of the Tribulation -- "times" (singular) is one year + "times" (plural) is two years + "...half a time...", is half of a year - so, $1+2+1/2 = 3-1/2$ years (Daniel 7:25 / 12:7 / Revelation 12:14). The beginning of the Tribulation is the point when the Antichrist comes to power (Revelation 6:2 / Matthew 24:4 / Daniel 9:26-27), and God releases the first four Seals of judgment. At the 3-1/2 year mid-point the Antichrist will declare himself to be God in the temple in Jerusalem, an action called "The Abomination of the Desolation" (Daniel 9:27). From this point until the end of year seven, years will be the time when God will release His most cataclysmic destructive forces through the final "Seals", seven "Trumpets" and seven "Bowls". At the end of the seven year Tribulation comes the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19:11 / Zechariah 14:3-8), the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19 / Zechariah 12 / Ezekiel 38-39 / Daniel 11-12), and the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20 - Timeline 5). Whew! That was a quick summary of chapters 6 through 20. But don't worry, we're going to study all of this in much greater detail in future lessons but for now this should be enough to help us see how it relates to the Rapture.

Now with that background on the Tribulation, let's discuss the four most commonly held views of when the Rapture will occur:

1. Pre-Tribulation Rapture (or "Pre-Trib.") - The church is removed before the Tribulation begins.
2. Mid-Tribulation Rapture (or "Mid-Trib.") - The church is removed at the 3-1/2 year mid-point of the Tribulation.
3. Pre-Wrath Rapture (or "Pre-Wrath"). - The church is removed after the 3-1/2 year mid-point but just prior to God's final wrath.

4. Post Tribulation Rapture (or "Post-Trib.") - The church is removed at the end of the Tribulation.

We could spend weeks discussing each version. In fact, whole books have been written on this topic. But for now we're going to hit the high spots for this lesson and to whet your appetite so that through more study you can come to your own conclusion.

1. Pre-Tribulation Rapture (or "Pre-Trib.") - In this view the church is removed before the Tribulation begins.

I personally believe this view makes the most sense from a Biblical perspective. It's also the mostly commonly held view amongst conservative evangelical Christians. We've already discussed most of the reasons this view seems to take place before the Tribulation begins, but for a refresher:

- At the Rapture Jesus does not come to earth but instead gathers us to Him in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
- This contrasts with the Second Coming when Jesus returns as the Divine Judge and physically comes to earth for war (Revelation 19:11-12)
- During the Second Coming the saints (the church) come back with Jesus. (Revelation 19:14). The question is why would Jesus rapture the church at the end of the Tribulation only to bring us right back?
- Jesus promised to remove the obedient church to be with Him and to - "...keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 3:10)
- And lastly, the absence of the "church" during the Tribulation narrative indicates the church is no longer part of the story. The "church" is mentioned almost 20 times in the first three chapters. There, Jesus gives His revelation to the church (Revelation 1:11), and through seven letters He characterizes segments of the church, segregates the obedient from the disobedient, warns them of their sin and promises eternal blessings to those who follow Him. Then after chapter 3 the church is not mentioned again until chapter 19 when the saints in white return with Jesus. There is no warning for the church prior to the Tribulation, there is no guidance for the church during the Tribulation, and after chapter 3 the focus of the narrative clearly shifts from the church to Israel.

2. Mid-Tribulation Rapture (or "Mid-Trib.") - This view indicates the church is removed at the 3-1/2 year mid-point of the Tribulation. -- Proponents of this view believe the church will go through a portion of the Tribulation and are raptured just before the Abomination of the Desolation. This view comes primarily from Matthew 24:21-22 when Jesus says, "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now -- and never to be equaled again [the Tribulation]. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect [the saved] those days will be shortened. Also, Daniel seems to speak of the Antichrist punishing believers when he says "He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the law. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time." (Daniel 7:25). This could be speaking to the church -- "...the holy people...", but it could also be speaking of Israel who despite their disobedience are still the nation God chose as His messenger to the world. It could also be speaking of the "Tribulation Saints" who turn to Jesus for salvation during the Tribulation (Revelation 19:4).

3. Pre-Wrath Rapture. -- This view points to the Rapture coming after the 3-1/2 year mid-point but just prior to God's final wrath and focuses on the timing of the "wrath" verses during the rest of the Tribulation. In recent years this opinion has seen more scholarly investigation, primarily by a Jewish-Baptist pastor named Marvin Rosenthal; and frankly, he makes a compelling case. In Rosenthal's view the pivotal word is "wrath" in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 - "For God did not appoint us to suffer "wrath" but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. "Supporters of this option believe this verse indicates the church will go through Tribulation up to the point when the punishments of God become more rapid and more destructive -- the point just prior to the seventh Seal when He brings forth the final Trumpet and Bowl judgments which is the horrific "...fury of the wrath of God Almighty..." (Revelation chapters 8-16 - 19:15). However, other scholars believe the word wrath in this verse indicates God's eternal wrath against the lost, and not just His short-term wrath at the end of the Tribulation.

4. Post-Tribulation Rapture (or "Post-Trib.") - Supporters of this view believe the Rapture occurs after the end of the Tribulation, which would be after all of God's destruction has been poured on creation. Proponents believe this timing is indicated by reference to resurrection of the dead in Revelation 20:5, but I think it's clear that verse speaks to two resurrections; the first resurrection, the "resurrection of the righteous", which began with the resurrection of Jesus as the first-fruit (1 Corinthians 15:23) and ends with the Rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 / John 5:29 / Revelation 20:6), and (2) the second resurrection of the condemned - "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended" (Revelation 20:5 & 12-13). To me this would clearly indicate that the second resurrection is limited to those who rejected Christ and are raised to be sentenced at the Great White Throne Judgment. Not a second rapture of believers which would have already occurred.

So the debate goes on. I've summarized the four most commonly held views of when the Rapture will occur and I've briefly explained which view makes the most sense to me. But please, don't simply adhere to what I believe until you've taken the time to search the scriptures on your own. Each of these views have merit and proponents can point to verses that seem to support their position. So what you need to do is study the word, prayerfully seek clarification and then set your heart where God leads you.

But here is the most important point of all -- the Rapture will occur. Whether it is prior to, during or after the Tribulation, true believers will be taken to be with the Lord. Our task is to be ready, to remain alert, to be ever vigilant, to understand world events, the position of Israel and the declining focus on God in light of end-times prophecy. Pay attention to what is going on around you. Be alert to how events play their part in scripture. The Rapture could occur before I complete typing this lesson or it could occur at some point in the far distant future, but as Paul said - "...wake up from your slumber, because our salvation [rescue] is nearer now than when we first believed." (Romans 13:11).

So tomorrow morning face life from a different perspective. As a believer in Christ we are children of God, wonderfully made and eternally loved (1 Peter 2:9-10 / Psalms 139:14). He will return to gather us to Him. When? That's what you need to figure out through study and prayer. But whenever it is we will be caught-up, made new and share in His eternal kingdom (2 Peter 1:11). But we can't take that for granted. We must live every day with that hope, view the world through those eyes and anticipate His coming with every breath.

"Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20).

LESSON 23

Revelation, Chapter 5, verse 1

Since chapters 4 and 5 are fundamental to understanding the rest of Revelation let's quickly review what we learned in chapter 4 before we start chapter 5.

Chapter 4 Recap:

After dictating His letters to the church in chapters 2 and 3 Jesus transported John to heaven. Here for the first time John sees the splendor of heaven, the power of God and two key characters who will play a role in the divine acts of judgment. --- Unlike Paul who was unable to tell about the "...inexpressible things..." he saw in heaven (2 Corinthians 12:4), John is told to write it down. He begins his narrative by trying desperately to describe what he sees in the throne room of God, but words don't come easy and John is struck dumbfounded as he tries to express what he sees in the undefinable presence of the Lord. Since God the Father cannot be seen (John 1:18), and "...lives in unapproachable light..." (1 Timothy 6:16), John describes what he sees in the best way he knows how; by comparing it to a heavenly light show of the most precious and beautiful jewels he can imagine. He sees a crystal clear platform - like a sea of glass - on which sits the throne of God, and he sees the One seated on the throne who looked like jasper and ruby encircled by a brilliant emerald rainbow. In a similar vision Ezekiel describes the same scene as a throne of lapis lazuli and sapphire, surrounded by brilliant light, with Four Living Creatures flying above it like living torches of fire with lightening flashing between them, and with structures like whirling wheels spinning and sparkling like flashing topaz as they moved. (Ezekiel 1:1-28 // 10:1-22). And if that were not enough there were "...flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder...", an indication of the emerging pre-judgment mood of God. (Revelation 4:5) --- What both of these men were so desperately trying to describe were the "...inexpressible things..." Paul could not define. They were describing the divine authority of God, His ultimate holiness, His unlimited power and His almighty glory, represented by a setting we can scarcely comprehend. And amongst this brilliant landscape of glory we see the Twenty-Four Elders (who probably represent the raptured church) and the Four Living Creatures; angelic beings who will play a key role in the announcement of God's Tribulational judgment. This glorious view is one we must keep in mind as we move forward through Revelation. For it is here and now we see the place where the preparations are being made for Jesus to retake His creation that for so long has been under the oppression of sin.

Chapter 4 gave us a view of pre-judgment heaven. Chapter 5 now gives us a view of Jesus - the Creator and heir to all creation - in His final preparations for war. (John 1:3 / Hebrews 1:2).

And with that in our mind we start chapter 5.

1. "Then I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals."

1a. - "Then I saw..." - This is not simply a vision. John is now revealing to us what he physically saw; a throne, the Trinity of our God, and one of the most important artifacts of the Tribulation - a scroll.

1b. - "...in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne...". --- From scripture we know that God the Father is unseen...at least to people who are still on earth. John makes this clear when he says "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is God Himself and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made Him known." (John 1:18). Likewise Paul tells Timothy that God "...lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has or can see." (1 Timothy 6:16 / Job 23:8-9). But that's ok because we have Jesus "The Son"...who is..."the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." as our physical connection to the Trinity (Colossians 1:15 / John 1:18 / John 14:9). Even so, whether physically or mentally John is somehow given a view of the Father sitting on His throne. Keep in mind, John is seeing all of this within the context of the surroundings he saw in chapter 4. The Almighty Father, on a throne of precious jewels, surrounded by a dazzling light show, and an emerald rainbow, while lighting and thunder crash and boom overhead and the Twenty-Four Elders and Four Living Creatures sing praises of worship to God's glory. Now through the lens of all this splendor John sees the right hand of God.

Over 50 times in the Bible the "Hand of God" -- and more specifically His right hand -- is seen to represent His power, authority, divine actions, protection and discipline.

- "The hand of the Lord is powerful!" (Joshua 4:24)
- "The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:21)
- "He did this so that all the people of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God." (Joshua 4:24)
- "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time." (1 Peter 5:6-7)
- "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" (Psalms 110:1)
- "Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy." (Exodus 15:6)

Clearly, the hand of God is one of power and authority, but now we see His hand in an eternally defining role. It was God's hand that first made creation --- "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands." (Psalms 19:1-6) -- and now His hand takes the first-move in God's judgment as He hands the deed of creation to Jesus as He prepares for His role as the Divine Judge. Through millennia of grace and mercy God has been patient (1 Timothy 1:16) and slow to anger (Psalms 103-8), giving sinful mankind every opportunity to accept Him as their Lord. But now that phase has ended and the time has come for punishment.

1c. - "...a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals." ---- We see in God's hand a scroll - a document with writing on both sides. Several times in Revelation John is commanded to write what he sees and hears. It is through this writing that God gives us His revelation of what is yet to come, and the blessing promised to those who read, hear and study this book. (Revelation 1:3).

So let's quickly describe what a scroll is so we're all viewing this in the same context. A scroll was a piece of "paper" that was rolled up like a tube. It was the most common type of writing platform in John's day, and remained so until replaced by bound pages called a "codex" (book) around the 2nd century. Interestingly, early Christians are believed to be some of the first groups to prefer a bound book of pages as opposed to the ancient rolled manuscripts. I assume this is

because as portions of the early Christian writings were brought together to form what is now the Bible, a bound set of documents was more practical than a large collection of scrolls. The earliest writing materials (what we call "paper"; a term not used at that time) was made of Papyrus, a type of plant material found in Egypt that was beaten and flattened into a sheet. Later "paper" was often made from calfskin Vellum, or a lower quality Parchment that was also made of skins. By the Middle Ages the use of skins for paper began to be replaced by a cloth-based product cut into sheets and bound in books. By the 19th century paper was made of plant-fiber like we use today.

With that in mind let's see how God describes this particular scroll. John says it had "...writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. A "sealed" scroll indicates high importance. Generally normal writings such as letters, receipts or other common documents were not sealed. But more important documents like wills, contracts and deeds were often sealed to prevent unauthorized people from reading their contents without the owner's permission. We see an example of this when Jeremiah bought a piece of land from his cousin Hanamel (a wonderful story in itself) -- "I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales." (Jeremiah 32:10). The sealing process required large drops of wax, wet clay or bitumen (a type of asphalt) to be applied to both overlapping edges of a rolled or folded document. Often an impression was made in the wax or clay with a tool or signet ring to indicate ownership of the document. Opening the rolled document required "breaking the seal". As described in 5:1 scrolls often had writing on both sides. Usually the writing on the outside (once it was rolled or folded) provided the name of the owner and often a short summary of what the inside said. This explanation will be very important beginning in chapter 6.

The fact this scroll was in the hand of God gives it the utmost importance. Arguably, with the exception of the Bible it is the most important document in all creation. But what kind of document would God have in His hand? Chapter 5 doesn't tell us, but as we get into chapters 6 and 8 we realize the scroll documents the steps our Lord will take to bring judgment on all creation. In essence, it is the deed of ownership of creation and the actions Jesus will take to reclaim it from sin. The scroll is closed with seven Seals (a number of completion) and as they are broken they release greater and more powerful levels of destruction. Each Seal announces phases of judgment leading to the seventh seal which releases a blast of destruction called "Trumpets" and the seventh Trumpet releases a rapid pouring out of God's final and increasingly cataclysmic punishments called "Bowls". We will discuss these in much more detail in future lessons.

But other than Revelation where do we see this scroll mentioned?

During Ezekiel's visit to heaven God gives him a brief but profound view of the same scroll. His description reinforces the fact it contains the instructions and timing for divine judgment. - "Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which He unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe." (Ezekiel 2:9-10). God shows Ezekiel the written context of the scroll, but John's view will be the actual events themselves. In a direct connection to what we have seen in Revelation, Jesus tells Ezekiel to "...eat this scroll...", and then "...go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them." Then Jesus says "...Son, of man, listen carefully and take to heart all the words I speak to you." As this is happening he hears the "...loud rumbling sound as the glory of the Lord rose...", and he sees "...the living creatures brushing against each other and the sound of the wheels beside them..." (Ezekiel 3:1 / 4 / 10 / 12 / 13). We see all of these things in Revelation chapter 4 except the reference to

eating the scroll, sharing the words and taking it to heart. So what does that mean? Recall in Revelation 1:3 Jesus promises to bless those who read, hear and take to heart the prophecy He is revealing. By "eating the scroll", Ezekiel is absorbing and digesting what he reads. This allows him to take it to heart and share it (teach it) to Israel so they can hear it. That is exactly what the Lord tells us to do. --- Amazing.

In his parallel vision Daniel is given an even more detailed revealing of prophecy we will see come to pass later in Revelation. This is chronicled in Daniel chapter 12, a story that provides several other key Revelation connections. He begins by telling us -- "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until then (12:1). This is clearly a reference to the Tribulation, a time described by Jeremiah as the "Time of Jacob's (Israel's) Trouble", and later by Jesus as a time of "...great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again." (Jeremiah 30:7 / Matthew 24:21). Jesus then gives Daniel a view of the Rapture of believers and the judgment of the lost. Jesus then tells Daniel - "But you Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end." (Daniel 12: 1/3/4). The "end" the Lord is talking about is the time John now sees when the seals of the scroll are broken and judgment is released. We know this because Jesus then refers to "...a time, times and half a time". When the power of the holy people [Israel] has been finally broken, and all these things will be completed (Daniel 12:7). Recall from our lesson on the Rapture's timing with the Tribulation the "...time, times and half a time..." refers to the mid-point of the seven year Tribulation - or 3-1/2 years calculated as -- "time" (singular) is one year + "times" (plural) is two years + "...half a time...", is half of a year - so, $1+2+1/2 = 3-1/2$ years (Daniel 9:20-27). This period is further defined in Daniel 12:11 as 1,290 days, which is 3 1/2 years, and is described in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 as 42 months, which again is 1,290 days or 3 1/2 years. Daniel also mentions the "...abomination that causes desolation..." (Daniel 9:27 / 12:11) which occurs at the 3 1/2 year point of the Tribulation.

Quick Recap: As we have discussed, there is a "seventy "week" period described in Daniel 9 that is actually seventy segments of seven years each, or 490 years. This begins with the decree of Artaxerxes in 445BC giving the captive Jews permission to rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:24-26 / Nehemiah 2:1-8). The first 483 years -- sixty-nine of the seventy weeks -- ends at the crucifixion of Christ (Daniel 9:26). This leaves one remaining period of seven years, which is the final "week" which will occur at the end of the church-age and is the seven years called the "Tribulation", or "The Time of Jacob's Troubles" (Jacob being Israel - Jeremiah 30:7). A time when Israel and the world come under severe judgment, from which Israel eventually turns to God and recognizes Jesus as the true Messiah, and when the remnant of the unbelieving world and creation itself is destroyed. The seventieth week, the Tribulation, is divided into two 3-1/2 year periods. Specific events occur during each of the 3-1/2 year segments with the second 3-1/2 period often called the "Great Tribulation" when God blasts and pours final destruction upon all creation. The beginning of the Tribulation is the point when the antichrist comes to power, and God releases the first four scroll Seals of judgment. (Revelation 6:1 / Matthew 24:4 / Daniel 9:26-27). At the 3-1/2 year mid-point the antichrist will declare himself to be God in the temple in Jerusalem, an action called "The Abomination of the Desolation" (Daniel 9:27). From this point until the end of year seven is the time when God will release His most cataclysmic destructive forces through the final "Seal", releasing seven "Trumpets" and seven "Bowls". At the end of the seven year Tribulation comes the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19:11 / Zechariah 14:3-8), the Battle of Armageddon

(Revelation 19 / Zechariah 12 / Ezekiel 38-39 / Daniel 11-12), and the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20 - Timeline 5).

Why is this so important? Because when the hand of God presents the sealed scroll to Jesus it represents the beginning of the end. The culmination of God's prior creation, the purging wrath to destroy all sin, and the creation of a new heaven and earth for the faithful (Zechariah 14 / Revelation 21/22). It is this little scroll in the hand of Almighty God that sets all this in motion.

Whew! That's a lot to cover in one lesson, but don't worry if you're confused. We'll cover this in much more detail starting in chapters 6 through 16. But for now rest assured it is this scroll that will begin the final destruction of evil when the first Seal is broken.

Next, we will see who is worthy to break it.

LESSON 24

Revelation chapter 5 verses 2-5b

Quick Overview:

In verse 1 we saw the hand of God, and in His hand is a scroll. On both sides of the scroll is writing. This reminds us somewhat of the stone tablets God gave Moses that were "... inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God." (Exodus 32:15-16). Likewise, the writing on the Revelation scroll is also the writing of God. In chapter 6 we will see that the writing on the inside holds the detailed pronouncements of judgment soon to be revealed. Given that, we can probably assume the writing on the outside provides a summary of what is about to take place. The scroll itself is rolled to form a tube and on its overlapping edges are seven "seals". These are there to secure the document so only the person with the proper authority can break the seals, unroll the scroll and reveal its divine contents.

So what does this scroll represent? It can probably be viewed as God's deed of ownership to all creation, which includes a description of the actions He will take to recover His property. These are the actions revealed in His acts of final judgment against all sin, all sources of sin, and all doers of sin; across His sin riddled universe --- a time of "...lament and mourning and woe." (Ezekiel 2:9-10). As Daniel describes it, a "... time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until then (Daniel 12:1). A time further explained by Jesus as a period of "...great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again." (Matthew 24:21). This is the time of Tribulation that will now come upon a rejecting and sinful creation. A time for completing God's original curse on sin by casting sorrow and destruction like never seen before and bringing to bear the promised punishment of the enemy (Genesis 3:14-19). The scroll is the written plan Jesus will enact to make way for His sinless kingdom. A plan that after it was written was handed to Daniel to - "...roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end." (Daniel 12:4). The "end" Jesus is talking about is the time John now sees when the seals of the scroll will be broken and judgment released. A time when "...the power of the holy people [Israel] has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." (Daniel 12:7).

This is the context in which we need to study the remainder of chapter 5.

2. "And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

2a. "And I saw a mighty angel..."

- Although the Bible doesn't say who the mighty angel is, his role, and the role of many other angels is significant to the events in Revelation. So given the critical part they play let's discuss who they are and a few things we will see them do.

We have no idea how many angels there are in heaven. Verse 5:11 tells us there are "...many angels...numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand." (that's at least 100 million). In Revelation they will participate in every aspect of God's judgment; from announcing specific actions (6:1 / 6:7 / 8:6 / 10:1 / 14:6) to taking an active part in performing the destructions themselves (8:3 / 8:7 / 10:1). They proclaim the breaking of the seals (6:1-2), they

blast their trumpets of destruction (8:6) and they pour the final bowls of judgment upon creation (16:1). These roles are similar to that of the "Destroyer" who brought destruction upon the children of Egypt (Exodus 12:23). Or the angel who killed 185,000 Assyrians (Isaiah 37:36). Or the "Hornet" who was sent ahead of Joshua's army to remove their enemy from the Promised Land (Joshua 24:12). In Revelation chapter 15 we hear the thunderous voice of "...another angel..." announce, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come for the harvest and the earth is ripe." (14:15). Then in chapter 18 we see a powerful angel with "...great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor...", as he announces the destruction of Babylon (the antichrist's political, economic and religious government) (18:1). Then after the Battle of Armageddon we see an angel "...standing in the sun..." as he calls forth the birds of the world to eat the flesh of those who have fallen before Christ's sword of judgment (19:17-18). And after the Tribulation, and just prior to Christ's Millennial Kingdom, we see the angel who holds "...the key to the Abyss..." as he seizes satan and bounds him for a thousand years (20:1). But then again, maybe the mighty angel is Gabriel whose name means "Strength of God"? He was the one chosen to announce the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38), and to tell Daniel about these same end-time events (Daniel 8:16). Or maybe he is Michael the Archangel who protected the body of Moses (Jude 9) and who watches over the nation of Israel (Daniel 10:13 / 12:1). Michael is the "great prince" of angels and is the warrior who will fight satan in a climactic heavenly battle when the enemy is defeated and hurled to earth (Revelation 12:7). We don't know who the mighty angel in verse 2 is, but his role, and the role of many others, is set to define the actions about to take place as Jesus prepares His army.

Yet in the midst of all this destruction and judgment there is another angelic task that illustrates the amazing love of God. Part way through the Tribulation, when all hope seems lost, Jesus sends an angel to proclaim His gospel one last time --- "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on earth -- to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of judgment has come'." (14:6-7). --- Even in the final hour of destruction Jesus offers eternal life to those on the verge of eternal death. A life only God can provide.

2b. - "...proclaiming in a loud voice..."

- This is obviously an important message. Not only was it a proclamation, but it is a "loud" announcement that went out across all creation. It is the first of many angelic broadcasts to announce judgment actions, but in this case the angel also asks a very important question...

2c. - "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

- "Who is worthy? That is the question the angel broadcasts across all creation. Who has the right, the authority and the ability to break the seals and release God's wrath? Who is the heir to all creation, a creation that in its sinful state must be destroyed? Who has the power to replace the sin-ridden world with a renewed kingdom? It is certainly not a man, or any angelic being. It is not a nation, or army, or prince or king or president. It is not a committee, or parliament, or congress or any governmental body. It is not a pope or a preacher or any powerful human who has ever lived. The verse leaves the question unanswered - "Who is worthy?"
- Worthy "...to break the seals and open the scroll?"" - As with any legal document, deed, will or contract, the scroll is "sealed". This prevents its contents from being released by anyone other than the one with authority -- like an executor of a will. He and He alone can break the

seals, open the document and reveal the details within. But the question "Who?" still goes unanswered.

3. "But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it."

A search was made, far and wide to the very extent of heaven and earth. A search made in vain, but a search that helps us understand that no one, no matter how powerful could open the scroll of God or even preview its contents. Basically what this verse says is that no one or no thing who has been created is worthy.

4. "I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside."

- "I wept and wept because no one was found..." -- But no answer was forthcoming and with its silence John wept. In fact, he sobbed -- weeping and weeping. He was distraught because no one was found worthy to open the scroll. He was distraught because he had waited all of his life for Jesus to return and vindicate His followers. This is the same John who asked if he could sit by Christ's side in His holy kingdom (Mark 10:37), the same John who leaned on Jesus at the last supper (John 13:23), the same John who asked Jesus to explain what would happen in the last days (Mark 13:3), and the same John who ran to the empty tomb and believed in His resurrection (John 20:3-8). And now here he is, in heaven, with Jesus, but no one steps forward when the call is made for a scroll-opener. Obviously when Jesus gave John this vision he could have given him the strength required to withstand any supernatural sight or sound he might experience. But we know from 1:17 that John fainted when he saw Jesus in His role as Divine Judge. So it seems to me Jesus allowed John to retain his human weaknesses and fears so he could react naturally as he absorbed the intense situation he was now experiencing. Remember where he is and what is happening around him. John is in the throne room of God, surrounded by thunder and lighting, with colors from heavenly jewels and an emerald rainbow bouncing off a crystal floor while Four Living Creatures fly overhead with light and fire flashing between them and wheels of spinning topaz whirling as they go by, and all the while Twenty-Four Elders on thrones are singing songs of praise as they look down upon the scene. This is enough to shake anyone up. Particularly someone who watched Jerusalem destroyed, who grieved over the deaths of James, Paul and Peter, and who just recently received a letter from Jesus announcing that the church he helped establish was already falling into sin. This is the environment and mindset John is in as he hears history's most profound question being asked followed by a vacuum of silence he never expected. This was the silence when no one stood up to proclaim the right to destroy sin, no one who can open the scroll to punish those who have destroyed all the Apostles had worked so hard to establish, no one who can avenge the blood of millions of martyred believers, and no one who can answer the prayer Jesus taught them to pray "...thy kingdom come..."
- "...who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside." -- But only one could be worthy. Only one is capable of releasing the wrath of God on all creation. This is the One who made all creation (John 1:1-5); the One who is heir to all creation (Hebrews 1:2), the One who paid the price to bring God's grace upon all creation (1 Peter 1:18-21 // John 3:17). He is the One to whom God will make all creation His footstool (Isaiah 66:1 // Matt 5:35 // Psalms 110:1).

5. - "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and the seven seals.'"

5a. - "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep!...' -- The elder (probably a representative of the raptured church) commands John not to weep. Other times in the Bible we see Jesus tell people to stop weeping. When the daughter of Jairus died the people wept, "Stop wailing," Jesus said. 'She is not dead but asleep.' (Luke 8:52). When the widow's son passed away Jesus said "Don't cry" before He raised him from the dead (Luke 7:13). What do these have in common with John? They had all lost faith in the Lord to carry them through the trial. But more importantly, they wept just prior to seeing the power of God revealed through the actions of Christ. Just like John is getting ready to see.

5b - "...See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed..."

- "...the Lion of the tribe of Judah..." -- And now we see who is worthy to open the scroll. The one who has the power and authority to open, reveal and prosecute the end-times judgment upon all creation. He is the only one who is worthy -- "For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise..." (1 Chronicles 16:15). "I call to the Lord who is worthy..." (Psalms 18:3). "Worthy is the Lamb..." (Revelation 5:12). And now John begins to hear the answer he so desperately seeks. An answer that comes through the Warrior King of Israel he has always sought. The Lion of Judah - "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your Father's Son will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah, you return from the prey my Son. Like a Lion He crouches and lies down, like a lioness - who dares to rouse Him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between His feet, until He comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is His." (Genesis 49:8-10). This is Jesus, whose earthly lineage will come from the Tribe of Judah - the powerful leader who will rule with an iron scepter (Revelation 2:27) - the Messiah, born of Israel as a "...son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter..." (Revelation 12:5), and who is the "...rider called Faithful and True. With justice He judges and makes war..." and who will "...rule them with an iron scepter..." as He "...treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." (From Revelation 19: 11-15).
- "...the Root of David, has triumphed..." -- Jesus was also the earthly born of the house of David. The royal lineage of Israel's kings (Matthew 1:6 and 17). The Root [offspring] of David's father Jesse - "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him..." "...In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and his place of rest will be glorious." and "...the gentiles will hope in Him" (Isaiah 11:1-2&10). It was through Jesse, to David and through his royal line to Jesus that God granted the eternal throne of Israel's holy Ruler, "...and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever..." (2 Samuel 7:13).

But combined, the Lion and the Root, is a view of the Messiah that caused Israel to miss His first coming. They were looking for a Lion, a Lion-King, who would strike destruction upon their Roman oppressors. They were so focused on the warrior character of Jesus they completely missed the point that He would first come through love to offer grace and redemption (Ephesians 1:7 / Galatians 1:4 / Hebrews 9:15). Israel almost figured it out during the Triumphal Entry when He entered Jerusalem and the crowds shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." (Matthew 21:9). It was at that point and for a brief moment they proclaimed Him Lord - the Messiah - but within days they would crucify Him because He would

not act like a Lion or a King. Despite the fact He fulfilled every Messianic promise before their eyes He was not Lion-enough to satisfy their hunger for a Warrior-King.

5c - "...He is able to open the scroll and the seven seals."

- But now John sees the Warrior-King and it is Jesus, the Messiah, the Holy One, the Lamb of God. It is Jesus who has the authority and power to break open the seals and pour upon creation the wrath of God. It is Jesus, in His role of Divine Judge who will now take on the role Israel had sought for so long. But before He does there is another view John must see...

A view we'll see starting in verse 6.

LESSON 25

Revelation, chapter 5 verses 5-8

Quick Overview:

Our last lesson we saw a mighty angel ask the question - "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (V2). What an eternally profound question to ask. After thousands of years of God's grace being offered to man for the redemption of sin, after He had been slow to anger for so long, and after He had even sent Jesus as the final sacrifice, God's patience now wears thin as He prepares to cast eternal judgment on those who have rejected His amazing love. But opening the scroll is not an easy task. It will require someone who is worthy to break the seals and release God's holy wrath, destroy the entire sin-ridden creation and then recreate a new eternal kingdom for God's faithful people. But as we saw, this role can fall on no man, no matter how powerful. It cannot be accomplished by any nation, government, army, king, prince or president. And with that realization the angel shares news that rocks John to his core - "But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside." (V3).

John was devastated to the point of weeping (V4). He had waited all of his life to see His Savior's predictions realized - the promises He gave them on the Mount of Olives so many years ago (Mark 13) and again when He had ascended to heaven (Acts 1:11). The promise that He would return and establish an eternal kingdom, and in that kingdom provide them a home. A promise John had waited for through years and years of persecution and pain. But now, in this amazing place, with all of its glorious and overwhelming sights, sounds and colors, John is told that no one has stepped forward to break the seals and open the scroll. -- That is, no created being can step forward. The only one who can destroy and rebuild creation is the One who made creation in the first place, the One who gave His own blood as a sacrifice for that creation, and the One who is heir to all creation. He and He alone "...has triumphed. He and He alone is able to open the scroll and the seven seals." (V5).

But now John will see the Warrior-King and it is Jesus, the Messiah, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the Wonderful Counselor, the Prince of Peace, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Holy One of God, the prophesied Redeemer, the Savior of the World -- Jesus Christ -- now in His role as the Divine Judge. It is Jesus who has the authority and power to break open the seals and pour upon creation the wrath of God. It is Jesus, in His role as Divine Judge who will now take on the role Israel had sought for so long. John's heart must have been racing as he realized his Savior would now come as the warrior, bent on destroying all sin and sources of sin. John knew he would now stand before His Lord in His almighty power.

But before He does there is another view John must see...

6. - "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

6a. "Then..."

- It seems as though John was slightly taken aback. The word "Then" used in this way gives me an impression like, "But wait a minute...". John was told he would see the Lion of Judah - a powerful warrior - and the Root of David - a powerful king of Israel. Instead he sees something that at first seems totally unexpected...

6b. "...I saw a Lamb..."

- According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the word lamb is used 108 times in the Bible to identify a singular lamb; plus 79 more times when speaking of multiple lambs or herds. Seventy-seven of the 108 singular uses are in the Old Testament and 31 are in the New Testament. Interestingly, a majority of 31 New Testament uses 29 (94%) are in the book of Revelation. Obviously, this term plays a key role in the revealing of Jesus in His role as Judge, and then linking that role to His position as the sacrifice for man.

Generally in the Old Testament the term lamb is used in reference to the Passover lamb - whose shed blood protected God's people from destruction, or more specifically it speaks to the priest's sacrifice of a spotless lamb to atone for the people's sin (Exodus 12:21 / Leviticus 14:10 / Numbers 9:11). But at times it was also used as a direct Messianic prophecy. - For instance, when God directed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham trusted God and knew "God Himself will provide the Lamb... (Genesis 22:8). Of course the lamb God provided to save Isaac is representative of the Lamb [Jesus] He would provide to save the world (John 3:17). Later Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah's crucifixion proclaims - "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a Lamb to the slaughter... (Isaiah 53:7 / Jeremiah 11:19). This was speaking of a future time when Jesus would go through His trial, torture and crucifixion without fighting back or offering any resistance - "But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge..." (Matthew 27:14 / Mark 15:5 / Luke 23:9).

But it is the New Testament proclamation of John the Baptist that we most-often associate with Jesus -- "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). It is with this physical recognition of who Jesus is that the term "Lamb" was no longer a veiled prophecy of the coming Messiah, but is now a reality in the Son of Man, who is also the Son of God (Revelation 1:13). We see this explained in Acts 8:32-33 when Phillip witnesses to the Ethiopian and clarifies Isaiah's prophecy that the Lamb before slaughter is in-fact Jesus, the Messiah (Isaiah 53:7-8). Peter also clarifies this fact for those who still may not have made the connection, when he exclaims that the, "...precious blood of Christ...", came from "...the Lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:19).

But it is in the book of Revelation that the identity of the Lamb is so clearly established. First, we have John's view of the slain Lamb on the throne (5:6), we see the Lamb as He opens the seven seals of judgment (6:1/3/5/7/9/12/8:1), we see the saints who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), we see the Lamb slain from the creation of the world (13:8), the Lamb whose Book of Life holds the names of the righteous (13:8), the 144,000 witnesses who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (14:4), the Lamb triumphant over war because "...He is the Lord of lords and King of kings..." (17:14), we see the wedding supper of the church and the Lamb (19:9), and after all evil is destroyed and a new kingdom is created we see a city, a city that "...does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (21:23). --- Clearly, the Lamb John sees IS the Lion of Judah, the Root of David and the Divine Warrior-King. A connection Israel failed to make, even to this day.

6c. - "...looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne..."

- But this is not just any Lamb. This is a Lamb that had been injured; so much so, it is obvious He had been slain (Isaiah 53:5). We know which injuries John sees, because after His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples and His body still bore the crucifixion wounds in His hands, feet and side - "After this He showed them His hands and side." - and to Thomas, the doubter, He said "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:20 and 27). Clearly, the Lamb before John, the One who had been slain for man's sin, still bore the wounds that should have been ours. - "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by His wounds you have been healed". For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1 Peter 2:24-25 / Isaiah 53:5 / Genesis 3:15). But, now the Lamb, the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls, is standing. Not hanging on the cross, laying in a tomb or seated at the right hand of God (Psalms 110:1). He is standing! Victorious! On His feet, ready to move and ready to destroy. This reminds me of the vision God gave Stephen as he was being stoned to death for his testimony of Jesus - "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look", he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:55-56). Clearly, what John sees is Jesus, the Lamb -- standing ready.

6d. - "...encircled by the four living creatures and the elders."

- These are the two key figures we saw in chapter 4; the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders.
- Here we see four angelic beings who guard the throne of God and we see the Twenty-Four Elders, who seem to represent the raptured church. Both are "...encircling..." the Lamb. As if gathered around Him, attentive to Him, aware that something is about to happen; and they are prepared to help in any way they are commanded to.

6e. - "The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth."

- In nature, horns are provided to defend and inflict wounds in combat. (Psalms 75:10 / 92:10). Combined with the number seven that represents completion or perfection, the horns here probably speak of Christ's complete and perfect power - His omnipotence.
- Likewise, seven eyes speak of His ability to see-all and know-all. Eyes "...like blazing fire..." we saw in chapter 1 (1:14) and will see again in chapter 19 when Christ the Warrior-King returns for battle (19:11-12). These are His all-seeing eyes that ensure "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13). As with His horns, the seven eyes represent His complete and perfect sight -- His omniscience.

- “....which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” We saw the same “...seven Spirits before the throne...” in 1:4. A verse that lists God the Father (“...Him who is, who was, and who is to come...”), God the Son (“...Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness...”), and God the Spirit (“...the seven spirits before the throne...”). As we discussed in a previous lesson, there are several opinions of what the “...seven spirits...” are, but I believe in this application it probably refers to the seven characteristics of the Holy Spirit listed in Isaiah (1) being of the Lord, (2) wisdom, (3) understanding, (4) counsel, (5) might, (6) knowledge and (7) fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2). (1). And as with His horns and eyes, the “seven” spirits represent the complete and perfect Spirit - the Spirit of God going out through all the earth -- His omnipresence.

LESSON 26

Revelation, chapter 5 verses 7-8

Overview - verses 5-6

Setting the stage (Revelation V2-4): John is in heaven, surrounded by unbelievable sights and sounds. A mighty angel called out to all creation to find someone worthy and able to break the seals and open God's scroll of judgment (Revelation V2). But after a vain search the angel announces that no one was found. (Revelation V3). At this point, John was devastated and wept (Revelation V4). He was in shock that no one could open the scroll and bring forth the events Jesus told them about years before. But then one of the elders (possibly a representative of the raptured church) told John to stop weeping because someone worthy had been found. He was not a created man, a prince or king, an army or nation. He is the Lion of Judah; the royal Root of David who has stepped forward to claim the scroll (Revelation V5). But when John looked he saw neither a Lion or King. He saw a Lamb (Revelation V6). --- But not just any Lamb. This Lamb showed the marks of having been tortured and slain. This is THE Lamb, "...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29). This is the Lamb who is also a Lion and who is also a King. In fact, He is the King of kings. He is the all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful Lamb who as we will see is now set to enact the judgments of God upon His sinful enemies.

So let's read verses 7 and 8 in that context:

7. - "He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne."

7a. - "He went..."

- The Lamb, Jesus, who was standing and ready to move, now moves toward the throne of God. He wasn't pulled, or pushed towards the throne. He "went". A deliberate action He is taking.

7b. - "...and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne."

- Jesus takes the scroll from the Father. The deed to creation passes to the Son who now has the authority to open the scroll and carry out divine judgment.

8. "And when He had taken it, the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people."

8a. - "And when He had taken it..."

- Jesus now had the scroll. From this point forward He will orchestrate the actions within it.

8b. - "...the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders fell down before the Lamb."

As we've discussed, many conservative scholars believe these two groups represent the raptured church and four special angelic beings. Here we see them in total homage and praise. They don't simply kneel before Jesus, they fall, on their faces in penitence and worship of His holiness. They do so because they recognize and celebrate the step Jesus has just taken. The slain and resurrected sacrifice, the Son of God, has now accepted the scroll from the Father; and in doing so, will carry-out its assignments to destroy all sin. This is a defining moment in God's creation plan:

- Man was created in perfection
- Man was presented with temptation and a choice of faithfulness or failure
- Man chose poorly, and fell into sin
- Fallen man was offered atonement of sin through the shedding of blood
- Eventually, the supreme sacrifice - the Lamb - was given for all sin, for all man, for all time - If, and only if man accepts God's gift of grace through faith
- God was patient for centuries and offered man every opportunity to turn to Jesus
- But, now that time is over, sinful man and the source of sin will be destroyed forever
- And God will recreate an eternal kingdom for His faithful believers.

And now John sees this time unfold. Jesus has accepted the task of bringing divine punishment and judgment on satan and all who have followed him - even if they didn't realize that's what they were doing. When this happens the residents of heaven fall prostrate before their King as He begins the steps that will bring this phase of God's plan to a close.

8c. - "Each one had a harp..."

A harp is a stringed instrument and in ancient days was one of the most common ways of making music. The word harp and its derivatives are used 54 times in the Bible. Generally to describe an instrument for music that accompanies praise (Genesis 31:27 / Psalms 33:2 / Psalms 71:22). But interestingly, there are several instances where the harp seems to be used in the act of prophesying:

- "David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals (1 Chronicles 25:1)
- "...Jeduthun, who prophesied, using the harp in thanking and praising the Lord." (1 Chronicles 25:3)
- "As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying." (1 Samuel 10:5)
- The term "prophesying" does not always mean to tell of future events - although it can - but it does mean to proclaim the truth of God's message. Given the situation they are in and the fact each of the Twenty-Four Elders have a harp may indicate they are proclaiming the truth of Jesus, or they may be representing all of the prophecies proclaimed over the centuries related to God's end-times actions.

8d. - "...and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people."

- At the opening of the Fifth Seal (6:9-12) we will see the martyred saints as they cry out to God to punish their oppressors. These are the prayers of the persecuted. But according to Peter we are all saints, "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." (1 Peter 2:9). So it may be that the bowls - like those used at the altar (Exodus 38:3 / Numbers 4:7) - here hold the prayers of all believers through time? Prayers to God for deliverance and thanksgiving, or prayers like those in Revelation chapter 22 when we pray "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!". Either way, the prayers of believers are like an incense to God. An offering with the sweet aroma of faithfulness and trust like the offering of the priest (Exodus 30:7-8 / 31:11 / Leviticus 4:7).

LESSON 27

Revelation, chapter 5 verses 9-14

Looking Ahead:

This lesson will complete chapter 5. This brings to conclusion the introductory chapters that have provided a number of important fundamentals we need to understand before we move forward. Chapter 1 introduced us to the elderly apostle John, a man in his 90's, and a prisoner of the Roman judicial system who had been banished to the penal colony on Patmos for his testimony of Christ. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the letters from Jesus to seven churches in Asia Minor. These churches are the original recipients of the Book of Revelation and represent the character of the church across time. Chapter 4 gives us John's first view into heaven and the indescribable glory he sees as he gazes upon the throne room of God. We're also introduced to the first of many Revelation characters -- the Twenty-Four Elders (probably the raptured church) and the angelic Four Living Creatures. Chapter 5 introduced us to the Mighty Angel and millions of the angelic heavenly host. It also showed us the scroll with seven seals. The deed to creation and God's revealed plan for destruction of sin that can only be opened by one individual --- the Lamb of God.

These five chapters provide events and characters we will see over and over again through the rest of Revelation. That's why we've taken our time to slowly work through each chapter.

Now as we begin chapter 6 we move from the introduction of pre-judgment activities right into the events themselves. This is a dramatic change in focus -- away from heaven to earth, and from the preparations for judgment to the "Tribulation". This will take us all the way to chapter 19.

We will first focus on several preparatory lessons:

- Complete chapter 5 verses 9-14
- Overview of chapters 1 through 5 (as a refresher and catch-up)
- Deep-dive into the "Seventy Weeks of Daniel" and its relationship to the last "week"; the Tribulation.
- Deep-dive the antichrist. What he is, who he is, and what he will do.
- Quick overview of chapters 6 through 19 (to give us a feel for what is coming)
- Start chapter 6

These are fundamental topics we need to understand the context.

Overview - chapter 5 verses 5-8:

In verse 5 we saw John distraught because no one had stepped forward to open the scroll and bring God's wrath upon all creation. Then one of the Twenty-Four Elders told John to stop weeping and behold the scroll-opener; the Lion of Judah, the royal Root of David. The only one worthy and able to open the judgments of God. But at this announcement John was momentarily taken aback, when instead of seeing a Lion or a King he saw a Lamb --- The Lamb of God (V6). John would soon realize who this was; the Lamb whose sacrifice offered eternal grace and life to those who would believe in His redemptive actions. This was the Lamb John had seen crucified in sacrifice and resurrected in victory. The Lamb IS the Lion of Judah. He IS the Root of David. He IS the

holy King of kings, the Lord of lords, the First and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Victorious One who is the Son of God. --- The Lamb is Jesus! The only One who can open the scroll and bring forth God's holy punishment and judgment.

John saw Jesus, the slain but victorious Lamb, standing at the throne, ready to move forward in God's will. His seven horns portray complete power, His seven eyes show He is all-seeing and all-knowing, and as He moves, He moves in and through the Holy Spirit and His seven holy characteristics. The Lamb then took the scroll from the hand of the Father (V7) and as He did the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders fell prostrate before their King, ready to do as He commands (V8). Each had a harp and a golden bowl. The harp of praise may represent all of the end-times prophecies leading up to this event, and the bowls hold the prayers of the saints, lifted to God over the centuries.

This is the setting, with the Lamb of God - scroll in hand - surrounded by His obedient heavenly host that sets the backdrop for verses 9-14.

Chapter 5, verses 9-14

Since they are so closely linked let's breakdown verses 9 and 10 together:

(9). "And they sang a new song saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.'" (10) - "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.".

9/10a

"And they sang..."

Something I find interesting in the Bible is it appears angels generally don't "sing" praises -- instead they "say" praises. For example, in verse 12 when the angels join the chorus they are not "singing", they are "saying". Likewise, when the heavenly host announced the birth of Christ they were "...praising God and "saying", 'Glory to God in the highest heaven..." (Luke 2:13-14). If there was ever a time for angels to break out in song it would be these. Instead it appears they may announcing a proclamation of truth as opposed to singing a song of praise. So is it important that verses 9/10 use the word "sang" (singing) instead of "saying"? Maybe not. But...on the other hand, if angels usually don't "sing" then who is "singing" the "new song" in verse 9/10? We'll talk more about this later in the lesson.

9/10b

"...a new song..."

Why is this particular praise considered a "new" song? The words are not new theology, there are no new revelations, and it doesn't offer new insights about Jesus. Yet, it is considered to be "new". For comparison, the term "new song" is mentioned several times in the Bible. Here are a few examples:

- "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God." (Psalms 40:3).
- "Sing for him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy." (Psalms 33:3).
- "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth." (Psalms 96:1).

- "Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things..." (Psalms 98:1).
- "I will sing a new song to you my God; on a ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you..." (Psalms 144:9)
- "And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth." (Revelation 14:3).

In each of these examples the "new song" is a praise to God. But they also appear to come from those who have been blessed or redeemed, or to commemorate a recent event or victory. For example, in Psalms 40:3 God gives David a new song after he was rescued (redeemed) from depression and despair. In Psalms 98:1 the new song announces the power of God's right hand and His efforts to make, "...his salvation [redemption] known...". In Revelation 14:3 it is the 144,000 converted (redeemed) Jews who sang a new song of victory when they saw Jesus "...standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads."

So given this comparison, maybe the "new" song in 5:9 was given to the Twenty-Four Elders [the church?] to praise the Lamb as their Redeemer, and to commemorate their presence in heaven as Jesus takes the scroll and prepares to enact judgment? It is certainly a blessing and is something that had never happened before. If that's the case, then that would certainly qualify as a "new" song. At least that's how this speaks to my heart.

9/10c

"You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain..." --- As we've discussed, only Jesus, the Lamb of God and the Son of God is worthy to release the judgments of God. He's worthy not only because He is God, but as God, He was slain for His own creation so that His sacrifice might draw us to Him and the eternal grace God offers. This song is to Jesus and is about Jesus; in praise of who He is, His sacrifice for those who accepted His grace, and His triumphant step to open the scroll of judgment on those who did not. It is also a song of the redeemed celebrating their rescue from sin.

Let's break down three other key elements of the song and compare them. This might give us more indication of what the song is about and who is singing it:

- (1) "...purchased for God persons from every tribe..."
- (2) "You have made them to be..."
- (3) "...they will reign on the earth."

Let's look at these together:

9/10d - Who are the "persons", who are "them", and who are "they"? (all speaking in the third-person). It could be the Twenty-Four Elders, or the Four Living Creatures, or the heavenly host of angels; or a combination of all three. But if our earlier assumption is correct and the Twenty-Four Elders are the raptured church (redeemed and purchased humans), singing about themselves then the Four Living Creatures and the heavenly host are angelic beings and may not be part of this heavenly chorus.

Supporting thoughts:

9/10e. In verse 9 the King James Version says the blood of Christ "...hast redeemed us..." - using the word "us" instead of "persons", "them" or "they". I believe the use of "us" (speaking in the first-person) tends to point to the Twenty-Four Elders as the singers who are talking about themselves --- the ones who are redeemed by the blood of Christ. If this is true it would indicate the Twenty-Four Elders are "us", and "us" would be redeemed humans -- the raptured church.

To further clarify this, verses 9/10 speak of the singers as being "...with your blood you purchased for God persons...".

- Who is "you"? - That's Jesus, who on the cross shed His holy blood to cover the sins of man.
- Then who was "purchased"? That's the souls of men through the sacrifice of the Lamb, who, "...bought us with His blood..." (Galatians 3:13) / who "...were redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without defect or blemish." (1 Peter 1:18-19) /, and who "...were bought for a price..." (1 Corinthians 7:23) /, so that, "In Him we have redemption through His blood." (Ephesians 1:7).
- Clearly, the statement "...and with your blood you [Jesus] purchased [redeemed] for God persons [us / humans]...", speaks of Christ's redemption and atonement of sin for people. This too indicates the people speaking "us" are the Twenty-Four Elders speaking as redeemed humans - the church.

9/10f - Further, angels and heavenly beings do not need to be "redeemed" or "purchased". They are created beings, not born into sin, and therefore do not need to be washed in the blood (redeemed). This being the case, then the use of "us" to identify redeemed humans purchased by the blood of Christ would seem to indicate the Four Living Creatures and the angels are not included in "us" and are not the ones singing. If so, that would also point to the singers are the Twenty-Four Elders.

9/10g - "...persons from every tribe and language and people and nation." - Again, who are the "persons" Jesus is purchasing (redeeming)? They are "persons"; who are people, not angels. Also, angels do not come from tribes, languages (people-groups) or nations, but people do. In Revelation 11:9 the Lord speaks of humans on earth as "...men from every people, tribe, language and nation...". And in 14:6 we see an angel proclaiming the gospel to the final remaining inhabitants of earth "...to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people." This plus the fact the ones speaking refer to themselves as people, again indicates they may be the redeemed people of God - the church.

9/10h - "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God..." --- Here again, the KJV uses the term "us" instead of "them" to signify the singers are talking about themselves as those who are kingdom priests. -- Peter proclaims that as redeemed believers we (the church) are "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God..." (1 Peter 2:9). -- John further clarifies this is Revelation 1:6 when he proclaims of Jesus - "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father - to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." Again, this song is speaking of the redeemed - the church. It is us who will be the kingdom of priests.

9/10i - "...and they will reign on the earth." --- Again the KJV uses "we" instead of "they" to speak in the first-person about themselves. Signifying that they/we (the singers) will reign on earth. Revelation 20 shares with us a beautiful view of the post-tribulation kingdom where Christ will reign for a thousand years. Verse 4 says "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge." Likewise, verse 6 speaks of those raptured in the first resurrection, "...blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death [end-times judgment] has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. -- So who are these redeemed priests who will reign with Christ?

For an answer let's look at the message Jesus gave to the church through His seven letters:

- To the faithful church at Smyrna Jesus said "...Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the "crown" of life." (Revelation 2:10). --- A crown can indicate royalty, authority or leadership.
- To the church at Thyatira Jesus promised that if they would repent He will "...give authority over the nations - 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; He will dash them to pieces like pottery just as I have received authority from my Father.'" (Revelation 2:26-27). -- This is the authority to rule and judge.
- To the faithful at Philadelphia He cautions them to "Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown." (Revelation 3:11). - Again, a crown of royal authority.
- And even to the pathetic church at Laodica He promises the right to "...sit with Me on My throne..." (Revelation 3:21) -- A place of honor if they would simply be obedient.

Each of these verses speak to those who will reign and rule with Jesus -- the redeemed believers - the church.

9/10j - So if the redeemed are singing about themselves (us), and if they (we) are the ones (persons) purchased by the blood of Christ, and if they (we) are the ones from every tribe, language and nation who will become priests and reign on earth with Jesus, then scripture seems to indicate that those singing are the Twenty-Four Elders, and as the redeemed in heaven singing the new song, then they must be the raptured church -- the body of redeemed humans in the presence of God as Jesus takes the first tribulational steps of judgment.

So here's how all of that collectively fits together in my head:

- Those "singing" the "new" song must be one or more of the three groups mentioned in chapter 5 -- the Four Living Creatures, the Twenty-Four Elders or the angels. But which one(s)?
- They may not be the Four Living Creatures or the angels because they are angelic and as we discussed, they typically don't appear to "sing".
- If that's the case then that would only leave the Twenty-Four Elders.
- And... if it is them, and if they are singing about themselves ("us"), then that would mean they are the group mentioned later in this verse who are redeemed and purchased people from every tribe, language and nation.
- And...if they are "people" who are "purchased" by the blood of Jesus then they would be redeemed humans.
- And... if the ones singing are redeemed and purchased humans from every tribe, language and nation...and...if they are in heaven, then it seems logical they would be the raptured church.

- Of course, this is not hard fast evidence, but I thought it was interesting to break this down to see where it leads us. At least that is what the combination of scripture indicates to me.

11. "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the four living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:"

11a.

"Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels..." -- Now John sees (looked) and hears (heard) many angels as they raise their voices in praise. As discussed, they may not have participated in singing the "new song", but now they join in the praise.

11b. - "...numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand..." --- The Bible doesn't tell us how many angels there are in heaven. Here, John's description indicating millions of angels (the same as Daniel's in Daniel 6:10) gives us some indication of the majestic view he is seeing. The Greek term used here is the same one used to describe the crowds when Jesus was teaching on earth (Luke 12:1), and when the writer of Hebrews describes God's coming kingdom. (Hebrews 12:22). Although the word could be defined sort of as "uncountable" I tend to think John's use probably describes just what he and Daniel saw --- millions of angels.

11c. - "They encircled the throne and the four living creatures and the elders." -- Adding to the splendor John described in chapter 4 of God's throne room (flashing lights, crystal platform, emerald rainbow, flying beings, thunder and lightning) he now adds the visual imagery of millions of angels circling overhead as they cry out their praises to God. --- Just set back for a moment, let this all soak in and try to picture what John sees.

Then let's breakdown verses 12 and 13 together:

(12) "In a loud voice they were saying, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (13) "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying" "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!"

12/13a - "In a loud voice they were saying:"... --- As we discussed above the angels do not appear to be "singing" their praise, but are instead "saying" it. But either way, they are proclaiming it in a "loud" voice. The voice of millions of angels in unison lifting praises to Almighty God. What a sight that will be when we see it.

12/13b - "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain..." --- And as the Twenty Four Elders did in verses 9 and 10 the heavenly host now exclaims that Jesus is the worthy Lamb of God. He is not only worthy because He is God and the heir to all creation, but He is notably worthy because He, and He alone, became the sacrifice of God to free men of sin through His blood-poured grace of God.

12/13c - "...to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" --- Here we see seven characteristics of Christ - , power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and praise. All glory goes to God and through God to Jesus, to whom all creation is His footstool

(Hebrews 10:13 / Psalms 110:1). The angel's praise is similar to David's prayer at the commemoration of the future temple by Solomon. In his prayer David exalts the Lord by characterizing His holiness as greatness, power, glory, majesty, splendor, wealth, honor and strength. Similar praise is given by the Four Living Creatures and Twenty Four Elders in Revelation 4:11, worthy, glory, honor and power, and then by the angels again in 7:11-12 when they "say", praise, glory, wisdom, honor, power and strength "...to our God for ever and ever. Amen!". --- I don't know about you, but if that's the way God is praised in heaven, then that's the way we should praise Him here. Try that the next time you pray. Leave your requests and needs until the end, but start by letting Him know you see Him in this way. I can guarantee your prayers will be different in your heart.

13. "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying" "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!" ---- The phrase every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea is a way of saying that all creation will praise God. What a sound that will be! When every vocal creature throughout creation praises their Maker - our God. No written word of man, no song, nor praise of utterances, no poem or book or orchestra or chorus, no matter how large or loud can give any indication of what this will sound like. It will be the praise of God across all creation, and it will include us, the raptured believers in Christ. It reminds me of Jesus' comment at the Triumphal Entry. When the large crowd who followed Jesus "...began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.'" The Pharisees (an instrument of satan -- and in one sense an early "anti" Christ) told Jesus to quiet His followers. To which Jesus replied "...if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:37-40). In other words, all creation, even stones cry out the majesty of God and of the Lamb. This is the praise owed to God. A praise the Psalmist reminds us includes all things who will praise: from the heavens, the heights, the angels, heavenly hosts, sun, moon, shining stars, waters, from the earth, great sea creatures, ocean depths, lightening, hail, snow, clouds, stormy winds, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, wild animals, cattle, small creatures, flying birds, kings, nations, princes, rulers, young men, maidens, old men and children. "Let them praise the name of the Lord." (Psalms 148:1-13). (14). - "The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped."

My goodness, just reading Psalms 148 makes me tingle at the reality we will one day see, and saying it brings me to my knees. This is what John hears and we will be part of that praise.

LESSON 28

Review of Revelations chapters 1 through 5

The transition between chapters 5 and 6 is significant. In chapter 5 we conclude John's visit to heaven and return to earth to witness the Tribulational events that will occur between chapters 6 to 19. This transition is a good point to step-back for a refresher of chapters 1 through 5 to ensure we have a firm grip on several fundamental characters and events we'll see over and over in the chapters ahead.

In our review, we will:

- Brief overview of chapters 1 through 5 (as a refresher and catch-up for new class members)
 - Deep-dive the "Seventy Weeks of Daniel" and the role it plays in the Tribulation.
 - Deep-dive the antichrist.
 - High-level overview of chapters 6 through 19 (to prep us for what is coming)
 - Start chapter 6
-

Chapter 1

- Verses 1-3
The Book of Revelation is God's "revealing" to us about the events that will happen in the future. We are reminded that what we are about to see is given to us as "...the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." (1:2) Not only are end-times events revealed but we will also see a view of Jesus we have not clearly seen before -- Jesus as the Warrior King and Judge. But what is so important from our perspective as students of Revelation is God's promise; a promise He makes nowhere else so clearly as this -- "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophesy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." (1-3). This is a promise we cannot ignore - a blessing to "read" (ourselves), "hear" (as someone teaches) and "take to heart" (to seek its meaning beyond our brain). I take this promised blessing to mean God did not write Revelation so complicated we can't understand it. But He did write it in a way that requires us to read and hear and study in order to obtain its meaning.
- Verses 4-8
As we will see, the Book of Revelation is written to all believers over time, but the message is given to us through seven first-century churches in Asia Minor. It is in this section of chapter 1 that John greets the reader with the comfort of knowing that "Grace and peace...", come to us, "...from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, (God the Father), and from the seven spirits before His throne (God the Holy Spirit), and from Jesus Christ...(God the Son) (1-4-5). This assurance of the Trinity is critical because believers through the ages will read this book in times of great fear and persecution and be blessed by the power of our Lord. The fact it's given to us by "...the ruler of the kings of the earth...", "...who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests..." (1:5-6), is so encouraging and comforting. We are further comforted by John's quote from Daniel 7:13 reminding us of the future coming of our Lord (1:7), who is the Almighty God. (1-8).

- Verses 9-11

Now we learn that John -- the Apostle, who was in his 90's -- had been banished to the Island of Patmos; a Roman penal colony in the Aegean Sea. It is here, under persecution and risk of death, that God gives John a view of the coming end and the action to write it down. I am so encouraged by John's situation. Given the enormous task placed upon him by Jesus you would think He would have given John a comfortable home, modern writing equipment and maybe even a younger age. Instead, John wrote Revelation as an elderly prisoner who was suffering under the harsh hand of the Roman Empire. It was under these conditions that God gave him this assignment -- and He expected him to do it well. I often wonder during the trials of my own life if God has placed me on a Patmos of my own. In a situation that is challenging, yet He expects me to do and act as He commands, and to do it well. - Think on that.

As John was contemplating his situation he fell into a vision and heard a "...loud voice like a trumpet..."(11), who told him to write down what he was about to see and hear and to give it to seven churches. It is through these representative churches that we will later see the spiritual maturity and failure of the "church" through time.

- Verses 12-16

Now we begin to see one of the true blessings of Revelation -- a view of Jesus seen more clearly here than anywhere else in the Bible. A view of Jesus as the Warrior Judge. At the sound of His voice John turns around and sees a man whose description indicates His wisdom, power, and might as he steps among the lampstands that represent the church. His eyes blaze, His voice thunders, His words cut and His feet pound-out the power of God's coming wrath. And at this sight John does what Daniel and Ezekiel also did -- he fainted.

- Verses 17-20

But the man - Jesus - reassures John and reminds him who He is - the Living One, the First and the Last, the one who will live and rule forever. The Messiah. The Son of God.

Key Take-aways From Chapter 1

- God's "revelation" is not only about end-times events, but it is a revelation of Jesus.
- It provides a promised blessing to all who read it, hear it and take it to heart. This is a blessing the majority of Christians never seek.
- John is in his 90's and a prisoner on the Island of Patmos as he writes the revelation God gives him.
- The book will be revealed to seven churches -- and through them to the church through all ages. These are groups of people who characterize the spiritual maturity of the church over time.
- And now we begin to see Jesus in ways we have not seen Him before. As the divine Judge who is preparing to bring God's wrath upon all creation.

Chapters 2 and 3

- Verses 2:1-29 and 3:1-22

Chapters 2 and 3 are a single story so we'll discuss them that way. They provide the letters Jesus wrote (through John) to seven churches in Asia Minor - modern day Turkey. These are not symbolic. They are real letters, to real churches, with real people, in real cities who were the offspring of early mission work by Paul and others who planted churches in areas overrun by ancient Greek mythology or Roman ideology and emperor worship -- places of unbelievable sin. Taken together these seven churches represent the spiritual maturity or falling away of the "church" over time. But individually they provide real-life examples of church success and failure. Failure that is often masked by the churches feeble attempt to earn God's favor through their own efforts, or failure by growing more tolerant of sin. In either case, it is a sad commentary that of the seven churches only two were obedient. Even the most dedicated and hardest working failed in their love for Jesus. And in the worst cases, Jesus was gone from the church entirely, even though they had no idea they had pushed Him out the door.

I think the best way to review these seven churches is to view each one from the three perspectives of Jesus: (1) What they did well (2) Where they failed, and (3) their promise or punishment.

- Ephesus:

- (1) What they did well -- They worked hard, in toil and deeds and did not tolerate wickedness and sin.
- (2) Where they failed - They lost their first love for Jesus. In all their desire to do good things for Jesus they lost their focus on Him. This is so common in churches today.
- (3) The promise or punishment -- Repent or "I will come and remove your lampstand from its place."

- Smyrna:

- (1) What they did well - They were under great persecution but weathered it with strong faith and perseverance.
- (2) Where they failed - They didn't fail. Smyrna is one of the two obedient churches where there is only commendation.
- (3) The promise or punishment - No punishment, only promise. A promise of the crown of life.

- Pergamum:

- (1) What they did well - They remained true to Jesus through persecution.
- (2) Where they failed - They tolerated sin from outside the church and allowed false doctrine to enter the church, and in doing so failed to uphold the doctrine of Jesus and His gospel truth.
- (3) The promise or punishment - "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

- Thyatira:

- (1) What they did well - Good deeds, love, faith, service and perseverance.
- (2) Where they failed - They tolerated sin from within the church and allowed false doctrine to be taught. Doctrine that encouraged terrible sin and tainted their pulpit with sinful acts.

- (3) The promise or punishment - "So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely."
- Sardis:
 - (1) What they did well - Very little commendation. They thought they were alive, "...but you are dead..."
 - (2) Where they failed - For the most part they were spiritually dead and what they did was incomplete.
 - (3) The promise or punishment - "...if you do not wake up I will come like a thief..." --- Yet, there was a faithful remnant amongst them who would be spared.
- Philadelphia:
 - (1) What they did well - They were faithful in deed, kept God's word and had not denied His name.
 - (2) Where they failed - They didn't fail. Philadelphia is the second of the two obedient churches where there is only commendation.
 - (3) The promise or punishment - Jesus promised to "...keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world...". (the judgment that was now about to come).
- Laodicea:
 - (1) What they did well - Nothing. They were "...lukewarm - neither hot nor cold...".
 - (2) Where they failed - In everything. They thought they were rich and did not need a thing (including Jesus), but Jesus said "...you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."
 - (3) The promise or punishment - "I am about to spit you out of my mouth."

Key Take-aways From Chapters 2 and 3

- These are real churches with real people.
- Taken together they characterize the spiritual maturity and failure of the "church" over time and the faith or failure of any individual church or denomination.
- The letters are written to us to. For awareness and instruction.
- Their commendations and condemnations also provide clear guidance for us.
- They show that even hard work, toil, perseverance and love in a church can all be for naught if we don't understand that Jesus must be our focus.

Chapter 4

- Verse 1

Our vantage point now shifts from John's introduction, our initial view of Jesus as Judge and of the seven churches Jesus uses to illustrate spiritual maturity and failure. John is now in heaven, and more specifically in the throne room of God as Jesus tells him "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place..."
- Verses 2-3 (plus 5 and parts of 6)

But first, John sees the throne of God and describes it as only an indescribable scene could be. It is truly a place of such beauty and power the human mind cannot fully wrap around. A

throne and platform of crystals and jewels, encircled by servant thrones, amazing angelic beasts, millions of angels, lighting, thunder, colors and other sights and sounds we will one day see!

- Verses 4 (and parts of 6 plus 7-8)

In verse 4 we meet our first Revelation character - the Twenty Four Elders. As discussed in our prior lesson there are several possible interpretations of who they are. But to me, particularly after our study of chapter 5 verses 9-14, I personally believe they represent the raptured church. Given their white robes, crowns and thrones (chapter 4), plus their song of praise sung to Jesus as "Us" and as those "purchased" by His blood, I am personally comfortable with them as representatives (Elders) of the church. I also believe this is why chapters 1-3 speak of the "church" almost 20 times but beginning in chapter 4 there is no mention of the church at all, but there is of the Twenty Four Elders.

- Verses 6-9

Here we meet our second Revelation character - the Four Living Creatures. These are angelic creatures who encircle God's throne. They continuously praise God, and as we will see in chapter 6 they also participate directly in the proclamation of judgment.

- Verses 10-11

Here we see an ironic verse that many Christians quote, but few probably know where it comes from. As the Four Living Creatures circle the throne and announce their praise, the Twenty Four Elders join in. As they jointly proclaim the worthiness and honor of our King "They lay their crowns before the throne...". This is their homage to our almighty Savior; in that whatever crown they were rewarded is now laid at His feet in recognition that He is responsible for any accomplishment we may have made on earth. We saw this earlier through the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia, and again through the song of praise in 6:10 when we see them as priests and rulers who will reign in chapter 20.

Key Take-aways From Chapter 4

- John's view of heaven's glory is stunning and profound. We must ponder on what he sees in chapter 4 in order to fully appreciate what he sees in chapter 5.
- We meet the Twenty Four Elders, who (at least in my mind) represent the raptured church.
- We also meet the angelic Four Living Creatures. We will see both of these groups many times as we work through Revelation

Chapter 5

- Verses 1-3

We now meet our third Revelation character, the Mighty Angel. We also see a uniquely important artifact of the coming judgment. The scroll with seven seals. This as we learned is basically God's deed to His creation that has been damaged and corrupted by sin. Through Daniel and Ezekiel we learned that the scroll also includes the acts of judgment Jesus will take as He brings wrath upon creation. But here in chapter 5 the scroll is sealed and a search for the scroll-opener must be made. --- But when the Mighty Angel cries out for one who is worthy and able to open the scroll, no one steps forward.

- Verses 4-5
And when he saw no one step up to open the scroll and destroy all sources of sin John wept. He didn't just cry. He was distraught that after all this time sin and evil may not yet be destroyed. But then one of the Elders told him to stop crying and observe the scroll-opener, the Lion of Judah and the Root of David -- Messianic titles giving to the one who has all power and authority. It is He who will open the scroll.
- Verses 6-7
But when he turned to look John doesn't see either a Lion or a King. He sees a slain Lamb. A Lamb with all power and all glory. A Lamb who came to earth as a sacrifice for man. A Lamb who was raised victorious over sin and who sits today at the right hand of God. The Lamb is the Lamb of God. The Savior, Redeemer, King of kings and Lord of lords who is worthy to break the seals and envelop all creation in God's judgment.
- Verses 8-10
And with this recognition the Twenty Four Elders and Four Living Creatures fell before the Lamb, and the Twenty Four Elders began to sing a song of praise. A song proclaiming that they had been purchased by the blood of Christ and had been made priests in the sight of God. The song of the redeemed church.
- Verses 11-14
And here we see the fourth Revelation character - the angels - numbering in millions as they encircle God's throne and say their praises to Him who is worthy. And at this, every creature in heaven and on earth proclaim the glory and honor of God.

Key Take-aways From Chapter 5

- We meet two new Revelation characters:
 - The Mighty Angel
 - The angels around the throne
- John wept when he thought no one could open the scrolls of judgment.
- But he must have jumped for joy when he realized the Lamb he saw is the Lion of Judah and is the Root of David -- He is the Lamb of God. A recognition that Israel has still not made to this day.

These chapters reveal theology, characters and events we must understand as we dig deeper into Revelation.

LESSON 29

Before we move forward to chapter 6 (the Tribulation) we're going to discuss two key topics that are fundamental to our study:

- (1) the "Seventy Weeks of Daniel"
- (2) the "antichrist"

The "Seventy Weeks of Daniel"

As with many topics in Revelation the meaning of Daniel's "Seventy Weeks" is debated with several significantly different interpretations. We don't have time to explore each of these in detail so for the purpose of our study I will share what I believe is Biblical, which is in-line with most conservative evangelical commentators. It's a complicated topic, packed with details, and understanding it will take us through several books of the Bible that on their own would each require a detailed study. In fact, writing this lesson was somewhat frustrating because I know that even a six month study would only scratch the surface. So only spending a week or two on this topic leaves so much unsaid. But I'm hoping we can probably cover enough detail in a couple of lessons to give us a basic understanding.

Some Notes on Measuring Ancient Time:

The ancient world didn't have calendars like we know them today. As a result, they typically couldn't look back on a specific event and know the exact year it occurred. Calendars were based on seasons, the movement of stars, lunar and solar cycles, reigns of rulers, and a number of other variables. This meant different cultures might measure the same period of time in completely different ways. This also meant ancient civilizations generally didn't have an historical calendar that allowed them to look back on the past the way we can. One common way of recording time was to refer back to specific events. We see this often in the Bible. For example, in 2 Kings 13:1 we're told --- "In the twenty-third year of Joash son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned seventeen years...". --- Today we know this event occurred in 814 BC, but at the time they related the year in question to a known political event. This made perfect sense unless of course you were from a different culture and would have no idea what they were talking about. Another familiar example of this is seen in the Book of Luke and can help us establish the approximate time of Jesus' birth, --- "In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria." (Luke 2:1-2). --- The term "In those days..." points to an event in the past but does not give us a specific year. However, it does provide a reference point when the event occurred by comparing it to a political leader in power and to a specific event that took place during his reign. By looking at the political career of Publius Sulpicius Quirinius we know he was governor of both Syria and Judah for two terms; 6-4 BC and again from 6-9 AD. Since this was his first census (the second is discussed in Acts 5:37), it is generally believed that Jesus was born between 6 to 4 BC. Of course, that's not how the people of their day would have dated it. That's because they didn't view time as we do today as being either years prior to the birth of Christ (BC - Before Christ) or years after His birth (AD - Anno Domini - Latin for "The year of the Lord"). These designations were not commonly used until the 6th century (AD), so early cultures would not have a universal vantage point to count from. Even though these designations of years are aligned around the birth of Jesus, society eventually found

a seemingly benign way of removing Christ from the calendar by changing the BC and AD acronyms to mean something other than Jesus. This was done primarily so the calendar would be relevant to all cultures, but, don't overlook the fact this was a ploy by the enemy to take our focus off of Christ. Today, the scientific and historical communities commonly replace the acronym BC with BCE (Before the Common Era) and AD with CE (The Common Era). These designations were first publicized as early as 1615 and used by Jewish scholars by the mid-19th century, but they were not commonly used by the rest of the world until the late 20th century. Interestingly, although both BCE and CE remove any reference to Christ, the dates for BCE and CE still reflect a separation of time which corresponds to the same dates as BC and AD; which means, the point of demarcation is still based on the birth of Jesus. Either way, "BC / BCE" ends with the year "1" (counting back from 1) and "AD / CE" begins with the year "1" (counting forward from 1). Although 1AD is often cited as the start of modern time (albeit, the year of Christ's birth), Christ was probably born in 6-4 BC. This difference accounts for various changes in the calendar over the last several hundred years. By the time John wrote the Book of Revelation the official calendar of the Roman Empire was the "Julian Calendar", established by Julius Caesar in 45 BC but, of course at that time he had no idea what "BC" was. This was the most common calendar in the known world until 1582 when it was replaced by the Gregorian Calendar of Pope Gregory XIII.

So why is all of this important? Well, for one, I think it's pretty cool, but for another it helps us understand how people in the ancient world thought of time and why they thought of it in different ways. This is important so we can better understand why the Bible often "dates" events with terms like "Seventy Sevens of Weeks" instead of just giving us exact dates. But as we've seen, God puts information in the Bible so that with a little detective work we can determine what the scripture means. --- So let's get started.

Quick Background for Historical Context:

When God completed all creation He rested on the seventh day and made it holy (Genesis 2:2-3). He then commanded His people to rest of the seventh day of their week (Exodus 20:8 / Deuteronomy. 5:12). Interestingly He also commanded Israel to let their land rest every seventh year (Exodus 23:10-11). In other words, plow it for six years and let it lay fallow for the seventh year; trusting that God will provide what you need. God had warned them that if they failed to let His land rest every Sabbath (seventh) year He would bring great judgment upon Israel, "...seven times over..." (Leviticus 26:14-46). But early Israel went through many cycles of disobedience and amongst other sins did not let their land rest for seventy cycles of seven years, or 490 years. So as He had promised God allowed His people to be conquered and taken into captivity. By this point the people of Israel were divided into two kingdoms - Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This division occurred after the death of Solomon and was split roughly along tribal lines. This was prophesied by Ahijah who foretold of Israel's split into two kingdoms. (1 Kings 11:30-34). The conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel began about 740BC by the Assyrians -- "So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria (that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria), who took the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh into exile." (1 Chronicles 5:26). The remainder were captured in 722 BC when --- "The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria..." (2 Kings 17:5-6). Likewise, the disobedient southern kingdom of Judah (where Daniel lived) was conquered by the Babylonians about 606BC. --- "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah,

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." (Daniel 1:1). According to the Babylonian calendar that counted the years of a king's reign after the first year, the third year of Jehoiakim would be 606 BC.; which is the same as the fourth year in the Hebrew calendar which counted a ruler's reign in a slightly different way. (Jeremiah 46:2). There is reference to this event in 2 Kings, --- "Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah and changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim."..."Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years." (2 Kings 23:34-37). We know from history that Jehoiakim reigned at the time we now know as 607-598 BC, which aligns with Daniel's timing of 606 BC (2 Kings 24:1-7 / 2 Chronicles 36:4 / Jeremiah 22:18-27). The exile of Israel was not only sad but prophetic. God had told Israel --- "The Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to another. There you will worship other gods - gods of wood and stone, which you nor your fathers have known. Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, 'If only it were evening!' and in the evening, 'If only it were morning!' - because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see." (Deuteronomy 28: 64-67). This describes what will occur if Israel is disobedient to God's commands. We see this during the Assyrian / Babylonian exile. We also see this in the prophetic warning of Jesus when He entered disobedient Jerusalem during His Triumphal Entry - -- "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes. The day will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and your children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." (Luke 19:42-44). We see the fulfillment of this in 70AD when the Roman empire lays waste to Jerusalem and over 850 Israelite villages and scatters them amongst the nations until 1948 when they became a nation again. These events are prophetic of the destruction of disobedient Israel. A destruction Daniel witnessed first-hand when, --- "So Judah went into captivity, away from her land." (2 Kings 25:21).

And while this was happening --- "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests, all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken to Jeremiah." (2 Chronicles 36:21). After this, God's land could rest as He had commanded. Israel had failed to uphold God's instructions, but God's instructions will always be fulfilled whether we like it or not. In this case the land of Israel rested for seventy years while the disobedient Israelites suffered in captivity.

At the time of the Judean exile Daniel was probably a teenager. Sadly, he lived the rest of his life in captivity through trial and tragedy as he grew of age in a foreign land. But to me Daniel's difficult life can also be an encouragement to us. How? I'm sure living in exile for most of his life was something Daniel would not choose on his own. But during his years in captivity God used him in a mighty way. Not only to experience some of the most encouraging stories in the Bible (the Fiery Furnace and Daniel in the Lion's Den), but also to present some of the Bible's most profound prophecy. Similar to John, who was exiled on Patmos where God gave him the vision of Revelation, Daniel was exiled to Babylon and given a vision of the end-times and an amazing vision of Israel's future. So why are his trials so encouraging? Well, think about it this way; where have you been "exiled" in your life? Maybe a health issue, or a problem at work, or a financial situation? Whatever the circumstance that has exiled you in your own life creates a situation where

you must lean on your faith in God to get you through. So like Daniel and John, who when exiled found themselves in a situation God used for His purpose, so too when we're in the exiles of our life we must be alert to what God is doing through us in spite of the situation we find ourselves in. When we do that we may find He plans to do extraordinary things.

During his time in Babylon Daniel went through various trials and triumphs:

- He was picked to serve the royal court, but that meant he had to stand his ground and risk his life by refusing to eat items forbidden by God
- He interpreted the king's dreams even though the king's wise men were executed for their lack of wisdom
- He watched as his friends were thrown into a furnace - and survived!
- He read the writing on the wall of the evil king Belshazzar, he was thrown into a lion's den by king Darius,
- And...he was given an amazing vision of end-times prophecy by God --- the vision of "Seventy Sevens of Weeks".

And now, the Seventy Weeks...

In Daniel chapter 9 we are given a passage of scripture that on its own is very confusing. But when we dig below the surface it begins to open up a profound view of the future:

Daniel, chapter 9:20-27

20. "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for His holy hill - 21. While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. 22. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. 23. As you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision. 24. "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. 25. Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens'. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. 26. After the sixty-two 'sevens' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. 27. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven'. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up and abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

LESSON 30

This passage is rich and deep and literally covers thousands of years of time. It mentions the first coming of Christ (the Anointed One), His crucifixion (cut off), the Tribulation (destroy / war) the antichrist (vs 27), and his attack on God's people (the abomination that causes desolation) and the wrath of God (poured).

So let's break this down with the understanding that we're barely scratching the surface:

20. - "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for His holy hill..."

We know from Daniel 9:2-3 that he --- "...understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes." --- Amazing, the prophet Daniel was reading scripture from the prophet Jeremiah. Probably the verse --- "Therefore the Lord Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, declares the Lord, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants..." // "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years." (Jeremiah 25:8-9 and 11). From this Daniel realized that Israel would be in captivity for seventy years. A period of time that was almost over. So he went to God in prayer. Not only asking forgiveness for his own sin but for Israel's sin as well (Daniel 9:4-19). As he did he prayed the promises of God --- a prayer that shows he understood what God intended to do so Daniel asked Him to hasten. --- "O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name." (Daniel 9:19).

21. - "While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice."

Gabriel, the great messenger. The same angel who would bring the proclamation of Jesus' birth to Mary (Luke 1:26), had also previously visited Daniel (8:15). Gabriel came quickly and with urgency to bring God's message to Daniel. Note: The evening sacrifice was around 3:00 pm (Ezra 9:5)

22. - "He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding."

Recall in Revelation 1:3 God gave us a promised blessing if we "read", "hear" and "take to heart" His prophetic message. To me that means God would never offer us a blessing He doesn't plan to fulfill, and if He intends to give us a blessing from His word, then He will instruct us (as we read and hear), and help us to understand (as we take to heart). We see this illustrated here as Gabriel instructs Daniel to --- "...give you insight and understanding..."

23. - "As you began to pray, an answer was given, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision."

God has a plan that is already established . He already knew the outcome of Jeremiah's prophecy and He already knew what Daniel would pray. So as soon as Daniel reached out to God the Lord sent His messenger to answer Daniel's prayer and to explain the vision he was about to receive.

24. - "Seventy 'sevens' [KJV "weeks"] are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most Holy."

Ok, here we go...

24a. - "Seventy 'sevens' (KJV 'weeks') are decreed..."

It's important for us to understand this part. In Hebrew the word used for "week" (KJV) is "Shavua" which can be interpreted to mean "seven". So, seventy "weeks" can also mean seventy "sevens". But certainly seventy true weeks of seven days each would be a very short prophecy and would not be enough time for some of the events given later in this passage. So most conservative Bible scholars understand "weeks" to mean "years". Particularly given that Daniel was studying Jeremiah which also spoke of seventy years. This verse then speaks to seventy segments of "weeks" of seven years each, or, 70×7 which is 490 years. Are you confused yet? That's ok. It is confusing. But for the purpose of our study let's look at the Seventy Weeks as a period of 490 years. But...to confuse it even more you have to remember that the first century Hebrew calendar was based on twelve months of thirty days each --- or 360 days; not 365.

In a few minutes you'll see why that is important.

24b. - "...for your people..."

That's Israel. Daniel's people.

24c. - "...and your holy city..."

That's Jerusalem, the holy city of Jesus (Revelation 21:2).

24d. - "... to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness..."

As we will see starting in chapter 6, what Daniel sees will occur at the end is a seven year period of time known as the Tribulation. This is when God will bring wrath upon all creation and when the Warrior King Jesus returns and "...treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty..." (Revelation 19:15) and destroy all transgressions, sin and wickedness (Hebrews 9:26). (Remember, this entire passage is prophesying what we will see in Revelation when in the end Jesus will destroy all sources of sin and sinful non-believers).

24e. - "...to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy."

Like 24d, this portion of verse 24 also speaks of finality -- "...to finish...", "...to put an end...", "...the bring in everlasting...", and "...to seal up...". Each of these speak to a time when God will bring an end to all sin and disobedience. A time when He will establish the Millennial Kingdom and later create a sinless New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem (Revelation 20-22). This is the time when the need for prophecy comes to an end because all Biblical prophecy will have fulfilled and Jesus anointed as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 20:4 - 21:23).

25. - "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One [KJV the Messiah the Prince], the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens' [KJV "weeks"] and sixty-two 'sevens'. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench [KJV "wall"], but in times of trouble."

25a. - " Know and understand this:..."

Sound familiar? Again, this is what Jesus promised in Revelation 1:3? A blessing from "reading", "hearing" and "taking to heart" through the process of knowing and understanding. Although God is giving Daniel a complex prophecy He wants Daniel to understand --- the same thing He wants for us.

25b. - "...From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem..."

There are four times in the Bible when Israel is released to rebuild, but this is the only time when they are directed to rebuild the city - as opposed to the temple. From Nehemiah we learn that the Persian king Artaxerxes (465-424BC) granted permission for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-8&17-18). History tells us the Decree of Artaxerxes occurred on March 14th, 445BC.

Keep that in mind...

25c. - "...until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes..."

Clarification --- I don't like the way the NIV arranges this sentence. It says "...the Anointed One, the ruler..." together, but verse 26 aligns the "ruler" with those who come to destroy Israel. The KJV version says "...unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and three score and two weeks (total 69 weeks). The KJV doesn't use the word "ruler" in verse 25 or 26 but says "...the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city..."

Anointed One. I believe this speaks of Jesus who came to Bethlehem as the infant King of kings, but His people Israel never recognized that. But there is one point in the gospels, when for a brief moment, the people of Israel seem to have realized who He was. As He entered Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey as prophesied by Zechariah (Luke 19:30-31) -- "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9). The people placed branches or their coats at His feet and shouted --- "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 19:38). "Hosanna!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10). This is the brief moment when Israel recognized Jesus as their King.

Keep that in mind...

25d. "...there will be seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens'.

Ok, now we start the math lesson. Remember, seventy sevens (seventy periods of seven years) is 490 years. The first "seven sevens" (7x7) is forty-nine years, which is the time required for Nehemiah to rebuild the city. Next is a period is sixty-two weeks (434 years). So forty-nine weeks plus sixty-two weeks equals sixty-nine sevens or 483 years. (7+62=69x7 years each=483 years). But 490 years (seventy sevens) minus 483 years leave one week unaccounted for. So where is that?

Also keep that in mind...

25e. "...It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.

Goes with 25b. The mention of streets and a trench (like a moat with a wall) are indications the rebuilding was more than just the temple.

26. - "After the sixty-two 'sevens' the Anointed One [KJV "Messiah"] will be cut off and will have nothing [KJV "but not for himself]. The people of the ruler [KJV "prince"] who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed."

26a. - "After the sixty-two 'sevens' the Anointed One [KJV "Messiah"] will be cut off and will have nothing [KJV "but not for himself].

After sixty-nine weeks (483 years) the Anointed One (Jesus) will be "cut off" (crucified). This occurred at the end of the same week as the Triumphal Entry.

26b. - "The people of the ruler [KJV "prince" - small "p"] who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed."

I believe the "ruler" [KJV "prince"] here speaks of the antichrist. As we'll see in our next study, the power of satan has been seen through many antichrists (I John 2:18). The example given here may be referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and most of Israel by the Romans in 70AD. But more likely it speaks prophetically of the final antichrist who will seek world domination during the Tribulation. Both examples are the enemy's attempts to destroy God's chosen people

27. - "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven' [KJV "week"]. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

We will go into much more detail about this in our studies of the antichrist and the Tribulation period, but for now let's cover the high-points: "He" is the final and satanically empowered antichrist who will come on the scene after the Rapture. The covenant he makes is with Israel, when the antichrist pretends to befriend Israel and protect them from the world. The "one seven" is the missing seventieth week we talked about above in 25d. This is the final of the seventy-sevens of weeks - the seven year period of the Tribulation - which is divided into two, three and a half year periods. We see reference to this in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 when he describes the middle of the Tribulation as "...a time [one], times [two] and half a time [half]. Or, one time, plus two times, plus a half of times, which is three and a half, or half of seven. Revelation also describes this time as forty-two months or three and a half, which is half of seven (Revelation 11:2), and 1,260 days (which is also 3 1/2 years).

So why so many ways to describe three and a half years? To show the importance of the mid-point of the Tribulation when the antichrist will break his treaty with Israel, desecrate the temple, and by declaring himself God will cause the "...abomination that causes desolation...", (a topic for another day), "...until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.", and he is destroyed by God (Revelation 19:19-20).

Wow, that's a lot to cover in a couple of lessons.

Remember the things I told you to keep in mind? Now let's use them to summarize the meaning of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel:

1. To calculate the years we must use the Hebrew calendar of 360 days.
2. A "week" in Hebrew, "Shavua" means "seven".
3. 70 weeks of 7 years = 490 years.
4. The first 7 (49 years - 7×7) were the period of Jerusalem's restoration which started in 445 BC when king Artaxerxes decreed the rebuilding of Jerusalem.
5. The next sixty-two weeks is 434 years.
6. This equals 69 weeks (7+62) or 483 years.
7. In the late 19th century Sir Robert Anderson (1841-1918), the Assistant Commissioner of Crime at Scotland Yard - and a lay-theologian counted the number of days in 483 years starting at March 14th, 445 BC. According to Sir Robert (I did not count them myself), this comes to 173,880 days.
8. If that is accurate, and you count 173,880 days from the historical record of March 14th 445BC for the decree of Artaxerxes that would mean Jesus, the Messiah, the Prince and Anointed One, rode a donkey's colt Triumphantly into Jerusalem on April 6th 32AD.
 - That thought is so profound to my heart that I cannot adequately explain it in words.
9. But that leaves one week of 7 years unaccounted for.

So when is the seventieth week? Well, that's for another lesson...

LESSON 31

We're going to break our study of the antichrist into several lessons.

- (1) Introduction and Context and "What is an antichrist?"
- (2) "Why is there an antichrist?"
- (3) "Who is the antichrist?"
- (4) "What will the antichrist do?"

The antichrist - Introduction and Context:

As with our lesson on the Seventy Weeks of Daniel, a thorough study of the antichrist would take months to complete. Not because it's theologically complex, but a full understand would require deep study throughout the Bible. That's because the story of the antichrist is the story of sin. He will be the culmination of satan's battle against God, spread throughout the Bible, that eventually manifests itself in a single human who will attempt to bring the total depravity of sin upon the earth.

There are a wide range of opinions amongst Bible scholars about who the antichrist is, when he will come on the scene and what he will do. The Bible gives us many clues but doesn't provide enough detail to clearly understand all we'd like to know. As a result, there are many opinions, and many of them have no Biblical basis. So for the purpose of our study we're not going to fill-in-the-blanks with conjecture. Instead, we'll discuss exactly what the Bible says about who the antichrist is and how he fits into the overall Revelation chronology.

That said, I wanted to briefly review two common views held by a number of conservative evangelical scholars today. Both are certainly possible, but illustrate how different - yet connected - these opinions can be.

The Madhi:

Some believe the antichrist will be a future muslim leader known as the "mahdi"; also known as the 12th Imam or "the guided one". Proponents of this opinion believe he will create a powerful Islamic Caliphate with which to rule the world. According to the Islamic Sunnah [a text that when combined with the Hadith and Qur'an make up the major source of Muslim traditional guidance texts], he will appear in the end-times on a white horse to make war on anyone who opposes his rule. Muslims believe he will be accompanied by a second person of power; a spiritual leader named "Isa". Isa, whose Arabic name can be translated as Jesus, is referenced in the Qur'an more than any other person and is highly revered by the Muslim world. Islamic literature teaches the mahdi and Isa will make a treaty with Israel for seven years, but at the mid-point of the treaty they will turn on Israel and seek to destroy them and all non-muslims. In many ways the story of the mahdi is very similar to the chronology found in Revelation, but the characters are fundamentally different. For example, you will sometimes read or hear people comment about Jesus in the Qur'an, with the implication that he may be the same Jesus we worship (the Hebrew Messiah, the Son of God). This is completely untrue. Muslims believe Isa stands at the right hand of Allah, who is not the Christian God of the Bible. They also believe he is not the son of God, he is not divine, he did not die on the cross and he was not resurrected. Instead, they believe he is a human prophet who assists the mahdi in establishing his empire. Isa's role will be to form an Islamic-based world-wide religion by convincing Christians their belief in him as their savior is wrong.

The intended outcome is to establish a religion focused on the worship of the mahdi, who will, at the mid-point of the seven years, declare himself to be god. ---- So please be very careful what you read about Jesus in Islamic eschatology. He is the same in name only and is not connected to the Lord Jesus in any way. He is another way the enemy seeks to confuse us.

The view of a possible mahdi antichrist based on Islamic teaching is held by both Gentile and Jewish scholars.

The Emerging Roman:

A second conservative evangelical view (which I think is entirely possible) is the antichrist will be a popular political, business or military leader who rises to power within a revived Roman Empire that emerges in Europe. This view contends the antichrist will form an alliance of nations from the ten or so ancient people-groups who originally inhabited the European countries controlled by the Roman Empire. Keep in mind, at its height, the Roman Empire occupied most of the known world from North Africa in the south, to Scandinavia in the north, to Spain in the west and to Persia (Iran) in the east. A large portion of their empire is what we know today as Europe. An area that continues to separate itself more and more from God. This is particularly relevant given their history of anti-Semitism and the recent influx of Islam. The Bible teaches the antichrist - known in Revelation as "the beast" - will seek to rule the world, establish a single economy, a one-world government and a single false religion focused on him as the supreme power (all guided by satan). He will be accompanied by a religious leader known as the "false-prophet", who will help the antichrist make a treaty with Israel for seven years. But in the middle of the seven years the antichrist will declare himself to be God and desecrate the temple in Jerusalem. This event is the "Abomination that causes Desolation" we studied as part of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel (this is the event that occurs at a "time, times and half-a-time", or 3 1/2 years). Supporting this option, many believe -- and it certainly seems plausible -- that the current European Union of 28 combined pre-Roman Empire territories, the World Bank, the Eurodollar, the influx of Islam into Europe, the falling-away of Christianity, and the rise of anti-Semitism could all point to a political and spiritual environment that lends itself to the rise of a single, powerful leader. Couple this with the re-establishment of Israel in 1948, the recognition by the United States of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and the obvious acceleration of multiple Islamic powers against Israel, it certainly seems that Europe is becoming a stage for the fulfillment of end-times Bible prophecy.

Now, I said I was not going to venture into conjecture, but, here is a little more information based on a multiple of data sources. It points to a potential option that could be a combination of both opinions listed above - in other words a European-Mahdi. Personally I lean towards the Roman-Empire-European option as a possible source of the antichrist. Particularly given the condition of Europe today and their insatiable hunger for a single government and financial system. But a possible connection could be the rise of islam in Europe. Years of legal immigration away from the war-torn Middle East, plus the recent influx of Muslim refugees has resulted in an explosive growth of Islam in places it did not exist before. For example, Muslims make-up about 5% of the total population of Europe, with the highest being 9% in France. While those percentages may not seem like much, the total population across the 28 key nations of Europe is over 45 million people. That's 45 million people who probably believe in the mahdi option. On top of that, muslim women (on average) have more children than European women, which means the birthrate, plus the increasing immigration of Middle Eastern refugees could increase the Muslim population in Europe to almost 15% over the next few years. And that brings with it the fact that Islam is the

fastest growing religion in Europe - even outnumbering Roman Catholics in many areas. And on top of that, a large portion of the European Muslims are from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, an offshoot of mainline Islam founded in the Punjab of Pakistan in the late 19th century. Interestingly, they are a messianic movement community who believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1905) was appointed by Allah as the promised mahdi who will "...appear towards the end-times and bring about, by powerful means, the final triumph of Islam." (From, "Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law" by Walter de Gruyter). At the same time all of this is happening, the majority of "Christians" in Europe are non-practicing with only 22% attending church at least once a month. In some areas the percentage is much lower. In Belgium, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden for example, the population of "practicing" Christians is 10% or less. Additionally, about 12% of the population of Europe are atheist. In other words, the majority of "Christians" in Europe is in name only. Clearly, that coupled with the rise in European globalism certainly seems to foster fertile ground for the rise of an end-times leader.

To reiterate, I mention all of this just to get us thinking about the context of who the antichrist might be and where he might come from.

So what is an antichrist?

We don't know his name, but we do know he is real. Despite what some commentators may say, the antichrist (in his end-times role) has not yet appeared. He's not a Roman Caesar, he's not a past military leader, he's not an abstract concept and he's not symbolic. The antichrist will be a man. A real human. Who will be supernaturally empowered by Satan to make one last-ditch effort to destroy God's redemptive work through Christ and assume control of creation. In this role he will be the ultimate culmination of all human sin and disobedience against God across all time.

The term antichrist basically defines anyone who is in opposition to God; specifically His grace-giving forgiveness of sin through the work of Christ on the cross. Given that, we begin to see that the spirit of the antichrist has been in place since the fall of man, when 100% of mankind became the enemy of God through a single sin of Satan-influenced disobedience to God's command (Genesis 3:6-7). From that point until now Satan and God have been in constant conflict, specifically as it applies to the role of Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for sinful man (Genesis 3:15). John tells us - "...you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come." (1 John 2:18). He further clarifies what - "...many antichrists..." means by telling us that anyone - "...who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist." (1 John 2:22). Here John is not talking about the final and singularly evil antichrist of Revelations, but is pointing out the fact that all mankind who does not believe in Jesus as the atoning sacrifice of grace is in "the spirit of the antichrist". That's because - "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." (1 John 4:2-3). This is not a description of the single individual who will someday rise to the heights of evil power, but describes those who are in a sinful anti-Christ spirit. They are the - "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist." (2 John 7). These are the false teachers, false-prophets and heretics Jesus warns us about - "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, - "I am the Christ", and will deceive many." (Matthew 24:5). These are also the people Peter warns us about - "But there were also false-prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive

heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord..." (2 Peter 2:1). These are the same type of heretics Paul spoke of to the church at Ephesus (the church that lost its first love for Jesus - Revelation 2:4) - "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:29).

These are just a few of many verses that alert us to false teachers and their heretical views. These are the people -- around us every day -- who are even now in the spirit of the antichrist. These are the people who embody what the eventual antichrist will be.

LESSON 32

The antichrist - Lesson 2

We're discussing the antichrist in several lessons.

(1) Introduction and Context

- "What is an antichrist?"
- (2) "Why is there an antichrist?"
(3) "Who is the antichrist?"
(4) "What will the antichrist do?"

"Why is there an antichrist?"

We really don't know a lot of detail about the antichrist. From scripture we can get a general understanding of why there is an antichrist, when he is revealed along the Revelation timetable, and some of the key things he will do. That said, we do not know who he will be or where he'll come from.

In our last lesson we discussed a couple of potential options expressed by contemporary evangelical commentators. We also cited several warnings given to us by Jesus, Paul, Peter and John, alerting us to the fact the "...spirit of the antichrist..." already exists in everyone who does not believe in Jesus as the risen Savior. That gave us at least a high-level view of "What is an antichrist?" Now we're going to study why there will be one.

Why is there an antichrist?

From the day in the garden when satan influenced all of mankind to sin, he has sought to turn man away from God. More specifically, he has sought to destroy God's redemptive work through Jesus. His intent is to destroy God's means of providing grace and forgiveness to those who are lost. Over time he has attempted to do this by tempting man to sin, and in some cases, possessing men, nations and empires with deep-seated evil and false religion -- with a prime focus on destroying the chosen nation of God - Israel. But at some point in the future satan will embody himself in a single demonically-influenced human-being through which he will seek to rule the world. This will be the antichrist.

But until the eventual rise of the antichrist how has satan sought to accomplish his task?

Let's look at a few examples:

1. satan, the progenitor of sin, sought to be above God so he could become the supreme ruler over all creation. For his disobedience satan was cast out of his place amongst God's heavenly host -- "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, [KJV "lucifer"], son of dawn! You have been cast down to earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High'. But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit." (Isaiah 14:12-25). --- Jesus, who was of course a witness to this event, spoke of

it to the seventy-two disciples when they returned from a short-term mission trip - "I saw satan fall like lightening..." (Luke 10:18); an event also mentioned by Peter - "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment..." (1 Peter 2:4). This is an event we will see again in Revelation when - "The great dragon was hurled down - the ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to earth, and his angels with him." (Part of Revelation 12:7-9).

But when God cast satan and his followers out of heaven God still allowed him to influence the actions of man. He does this while constantly ...roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." (Job 1:7). An observation that was also made by Peter when he describes satan as a - "...roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (2 Peter 5:8). By allowing satan to influence mankind God created a situation whereby man, in his sinful nature, has to come away from sin, to obtain God's grace through accepting the divine work of Jesus who crucified our sin on the cross, and defeated our sin through His resurrection (see Romans 6:6). Now, as satan, lucifer seeks to bring sin upon the world in order to distract man from the need for salvation, and in doing so, overcome God's power and take His place. Throughout time he has done this through temptation and false religion which leads man away from God, but in the days of the Tribulation he will bring a person on the scene, whom he can control, and through whom he will attempt to destroy God's influence on man.

2. Have you ever thought about the profound enormity of this verse - "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." (Genesis 3:6). satan tempted Eve to sin, and through her he tempted Adam. Once both had eaten of the fruit, and thereby disobeyed God's one commandment, 100% of mankind became the enemy of God. Because of satan they were now in sin and could only return to God through the redemptive power of a spotless blood sacrifice (Genesis 3:21).

But for tempting man to sin satan was eternally punished. God cursed him and promised to - "...put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel." (Genesis 3:15). --- Of course. "...her offspring..." speaks of Jesus, and "...your offspring..." speaks of the product of satan, which is sin, and which will one day be manifest in the person of the antichrist. With this curse satan knew who his true enemy is. It is Jesus, who satan knows, and who he knows will come to earth. First to defeat sin on the cross and second to defeat satan forever (Luke 23:46 / Revelation 20:10 / Luke 24:26). The statement "...you will strike His heel..." speaks to a wound. A temporary wound inflicted on Jesus on the cross. But the term "...He will crush your head..." speaks to a mortal wound. The total destruction of satan we will see near the end of Revelation. So, with this enmity, satan's target becomes Jesus, His followers and His gospel. And by extension, satan will work to destroy God's chosen nation - Israel -- the earthly people from which the Messiah will come.

But how?

3. satan's influence on man is powerful and profound. Adam sinned in Genesis chapter 3, and by chapter 6 mankind had already become so wicked and immoral that "...every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." -- "So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created..." (Genesis 6:5-7). satan had almost succeeded.

He had tempted every person on earth to great sin except one family. The family that would be God's remnant. Had God destroyed all of mankind He would have destroyed the line of Eve and the earthly lineage of Christ. But God spared His remnant, Noah, a descendant of Eve, and a man who "...walked faithfully with God." (Genesis 6:9). Through him and his family God would extend the human race, and in doing so, extended the earthly line of the Messiah's birth (Genesis 9:1 // Luke 3:24-38).

4. But satan was strong and through his relentless influence man quickly fell back into sin. So sinful in fact that nations came together in the region of Babel to build a tower to heaven and "...make a name for ourselves..." (Genesis 11:4). In doing so they sought to put themselves above God - just as lucifer had done. "So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth." (Genesis. 11-8). Here satan had almost succeeded in turning man away from God.

5. But God chose a man, who in the spirit of Noah's obedience would establish a people who would represent God to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). He was Abram from Ur, in modern day Iraq, who following God's command went to Canaan where God would eventually establish His people and His Holy City Jerusalem in the Promised Land. In time, Abram (Abraham) begot Isaac, who begot Jacob, who was renamed Israel and who became father of the twelve tribes -- with one tribe, Judah being the next step in the Messiah's earthly lineage. But none of these followers of God were immune to satan's influence, so sin wreaked havoc across every generation of their family in an attempt to destroy them.

6. Jacob's (Israel's) family, avoiding a drought, immigrated into Egypt and began an exile that lasted more than 400 years. Initially they were favored in Egypt through Jacob's son Joseph, but after Joseph died the people of Jacob became slaves, and the descendants of Eve -- Christ's earliest earthy ancestor -- were now at risk of total destruction. The new Pharaoh, who did not love the people of Joseph and Jacob and oppressed the people; eventually ordering all Hebrew baby boys to be killed (Exodus 1:8-22). The Pharaoh believed by killing the boys he could reduce the growing population of Hebrews, but satan's goal was much more specific. By influencing Pharaoh, to kill-off the Hebrew boys he could destroy the lineage of the future Messiah. But God always has a plan and prevented the boys from being killed. One of these babies would grow up to be Moses (Exodus 1:18-2:10). The man God used to rescue the remnant of Jacob and thereby retain the lineage of Christ by sparing those who would become the people of Israel.

7. But satan never gives up and the Pharaoh pursued the escaping Hebrews with the intent to kill them all (Exodus 14:8). But God made a way and opened the sea, giving them passage to safety, and then closing the sea to kill their pursuers (Exodus 14:26-30). Once again, God saved the Hebrew people, the remnant, people of the coming Messiah.

8. But the foolish Hebrew people were disobedient. They worshiped idols and wanted to return to their lives in Egypt. So God punished them in the wilderness for forty years. During that time all of the original people died with the exception of two - Joshua and Caleb and the children of the exiles who would go into God's promised land.

9. But along the way the remnant of Israel constantly went through satan-influenced cycles of obedience and disobedience. For generations they worshiped idols, sacrificed their children to false gods, lost the law of God for years, were pursued by the evil armies, led by poor judges, ruled by sinful kings, split into two nations and eventually captured by the Assyrians and the

Babylonians to be taken from the land. Generation after generation of Israel went through cycles of obedience and disobedience, blessings and punishment and each time they did they fell away from God and put their nation at risk.

10. But God selected a young boy, David, "...the root of Jesse...", who would become the king of Israel (2 Samuel 5:12) and establish a throne that would last forever (2 Samuel 7:13). The throne that will be reestablished by Christ for His millennial rule. Most importantly, the royal lineage of David would become a cornerstone in the earthly genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:6). But Satan would not give up and sought to destroy David – first through a giant Philistine, then he pursued by Israel's evil king Saul and attacked by multiple armies. But much more destructive than the physical conflict was the temptation that drove David to the sin of lust, adultery and murder. For this Israel lost a great warrior, David lost his infant son, one of his other sons raped his half-sister, another son killed the sinful son, David fell into poor leadership and for a time his kingdom failed (1 & 2 Samuel). --- All of this put risk on both David and Israel, and in doing so, once again put risk on the earthly lineage of the Messiah.

11. At one point the earthly lineage of Jesus came down to one man - Joash. At the time Israel was going through great turmoil with evil kings who led the people to evil ways. Athaliah, the evil mother of king Ahaziah sought revenge of her son's death by trying "...to destroy the whole royal family of the house of Judah." This would have included Joash who was the last remaining male heir to David's royal Messianic line. But God interceded and Jehosheba took Joash and hid him for six years where he was protected by the Levites. This was done so "The king's son shall reign, as the Lord promised concerning the descendants of David." (2 Chronicles 23:3). Afterwards Joash became king and ruled for 40 years. Here again the enemy sought to destroy the Messianic line but God had a remnant, one man, who would continue the earthly lineage of Christ. (2 Chronicles chapters 22-23).

12. The book of Esther chronicles the story of Israel under the rule of king Xerxes. When Haman was made a member of the royal party, the king ordered his cabinet to bow before Haman, but Mordecai the Jew, secret uncle of queen Esther (it's a long story) refused to bow to anyone but God. For his insolence Haman "...looked for a way to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes..." (Esther 3:6). Convincing the king of Mordecai's betrayal Xerxes sent dispatches "...with orders to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews - young and old, women and little children - on a single day..." (Esther 3:13). Once again the future of God's people hung by a thread. If they were destroyed the Messianic lineage would be destroyed as well. But God intervened and by a turn of events through Esther reversed his edict and the Jews - the remnant - were once again spared.

13. Around 330 BC the Greek commander Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world including Israel. But rather than destroy the Jews he brought economic growth and trade that spread throughout the Hellenistic empire. But the impact on Israel was much greater spiritually than it might have been militarily. Israel, like the rest of the empire adopted the Greek language and culture; including idol worship. We know from Paul's epistles the world had become Greek, with the worship of Greek gods being common even amongst Jews. In fact, the culture was so prevalent that for the most part the New Testament books and letters were written in Greek.

14. Around the mid first century the Greek influences in Judea had formed the Hasmonean Dynasty. It thrived to some degree and was allowed to operate semi-autonomously. Then in the last years of the first century BC the prior Greek Empire, including Judea, was conquered by the ever-powerful Romans. It was the Romans who were in power during the earthly life of Jesus. It was during this time that satan ramped-up his attacks on God's people, and specifically on Christ Himself.

Here are a few examples of how:

15. You'll recall that after Jesus was born Magi from the east traveled to Judah following a star that guided their way. There they found the young Jesus and worshiped Him. The evil king Herod the Great, an Idumean and Roman appointed ruler, heard that another king was sought by these travelers. Herod - obviously under the influence of satan - ordered the murder of all Jewish boys two years and younger. If he was successful this would have killed the future Messiah as well. But God had other plans and sent an angel to warn Joseph and Mary who took the boy Jesus into Egypt and away from the dangers of Herod. (Luke chapter 2)

17. After Jesus had grown of age satan decided to attack Him personally. Jesus was taken by the Spirit into the desert where amazingly He was tempted by satan for forty days. In that time Jesus must have gone through a terrible ordeal because at the end He was attended to by angels. But Jesus - all man and all God, needed no protection. He defeated satan by His word. Every temptation thrown his way (which if put into action would have destroyed His earthly mission) was thwarted by the use of His words. Words we have today to use when we are tempted (Matthew chapter 4).

18. At one point during His ministry Jesus returned to His parents' home in Nazareth. There the gathering in the synagogue became furious when He claimed to fulfill scripture. They tried to kill Him by throwing Him from a cliff, "But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way." (Luke 4:30).

19. When Jesus told His disciples He would be put to death Peter was incensed and said "Never Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (Peter didn't realize it at the time, but he was basically saying, "You can't die for the sins of the world". At this declaration Jesus turned to Peter with an extraordinary response "Get behind me, satan!". Why would Jesus say that? Why wouldn't He just explain to Peter what needed to happen? Because Jesus knew it was not Peter from whom those words originated. It was the enemy, again tempting Jesus to forfeit His role (Matthew 16:21-23).

19. In a similar way satan used Judas in an attempt to stop Jesus when he agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Judas was satan's tool who would turn on Jesus (Matthew 26:20-25). But how could this happen? Because "...satan entered Judas..." (Luke 22:3).

20. And Peter denied Christ three times on the night before His crucifixion. Why? Because "Simon, Simon, satan has asked to sift you as wheat..." (Luke 22:31).

20. And then satan continually influences nearly all of Israel, God's chosen people: to arrest Him, demand His death, beat Him, scourge Him, and hang Him on a cross. At that point I suspect satan jumped for joy. Finally! After thousands of years of war, famine, sin and temptation the Lamb of

God was finally dead. satan could now step in and rule God's creation. --- But...in three short days he would learn just how much he had underestimated the divine power of our Lord.

25. Throughout history the chosen people of God have come under attack from satan. The Egyptians, Canaanites, Perizzites, Philistines, Midianites, Amalekites, and a dozen other ancient cultures sought to destroy them. Then came the Greeks, Romans, Medo-Persians, and Ottomans. And in more recent times Adolph Hitler (maybe the worst of all), Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, the Hamas, Boko Haram and Hezbollah. And symbolizing all of this conflict is Jerusalem, God's holy city that has been attacked 52 times, captured 44 times, besieged 23 times and destroyed twice.

26. And now we have the "Replacement Theory". A modern, misguided theology promoted by several prominent pastors today. It is their belief that God has replaced Israel with the Church as His chosen people. I honestly don't understand how they can believe this in light of God's word. --- "Then I looked and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, [Israel] and with Him 144,000 [Jews] who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1).

So why is it important to understand all of these examples? Because all of these are dark forces that had two things in common. -- They were all influenced by satan, and they were all focused on destroying the people of God, who in-turn would destroy the Son of God, and thereby destroy the blood-atoning sin-forgiving grace of God. In other words, satan's entire focus is the domination over God and His creation through the destruction of Jesus. He has done this over and over through time, but every time he does he fails. But there will be a time when he will attempt one last horrendous attack of sin and destruction. And he will do so through the antichrist.

Next, we will discuss "Who is the antichrist?"

LESSON 33

Who is the antichrist?

We've completed the first two lessons in our study of the antichrist:

- (1) What is an antichrist?
- (2) Why is there an antichrist?

We'll continue with lesson 3 (NOC), Who is the antichrist?; followed by our final lesson (4), What will the antichrist do? This level of study is important so that as we work through the Tribulation period (chapters 6 through 19) we'll have a firm understanding of the force of satan working through his own earthly representative.

Who is the antichrist?

I'll repeat what I said about the antichrist in our introduction. --- The Bible doesn't tell us his name, but we know he's real and despite what some commentators may say, the antichrist (in his end-times role) has not yet appeared.

He was not Antiochus Epiphanes, the evil Seleucid king who in 168BC invaded Jerusalem, made the altar of the temple into a shrine of zeus and sacrificed a pig on it. This was the original "Abomination that causes desolation" spoken of by Daniel and Jesus - (Daniel 9:27). It is also a precursor to actions the antichrist will take at the 3 1/2 year mid-point of the Tribulation (Daniel 7:25 & 9:27 / 11:31 / Mark 13:14 / Matthew 24:15).

- He was not Titus, the Roman general and son of emperor Vespasian, who destroyed Jerusalem and much of Israel in AD70.
- He was not any of the Roman emperors who sent legions of soldiers into Israel, occupied their territory for decades and executed or imprisoned millions of Jews.
- He was not Adolf Hitler, who masterminded the vicious death of over six million Jews in the 1940's, and in doing so, turned his entire nation against God's chosen people. Although Hitler is probably the best-known example of what the antichrist may be like, the antichrist himself will be a million times more evil.
- He is not a symbol or an abstract concept. He is real, and he has yet to be revealed.

All of these people, and many more, operated in the "spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 2:22-23/ 4:2-3), but they are not the person of the antichrist who will be revealed during the Tribulation (Daniel 9:27 / Matthew 24:15). He will be a man - a human - who will be used by satan to bring sin upon the earth in order to destroy the redemptive work of Christ so that satan can assume control of creation. He will be the ultimate culmination of all human sin and disobedience against God. He will be vile, evil, ruthless and cunning beyond our understanding.

The antichrist is mentioned many places in the Bible, but often in ways we might not recognize. Here are just a few:

- The "beast" (Revelation 13:1 / 13:8 / 14:9 / 16:2)
- The "man of lawlessness", (2 Thessalonians 2:3 - KJV "son of perdition")
- The "man doomed to destruction" (also 2 Thessalonians 2:3)
- The "king of Babylon" The "oppressor [who] has come to an end!" (Isaiah 14:4)

- The "little horn" (Daniel 7:8 / 24)
- The "ruler who will come" (Daniel 9:26)
- The "king who will do as he pleases" (Daniel 11:36)

But we must look beyond his names to better understand who the antichrist is. And for that we will turn to the apostle Paul and his teaching to the church at Thessalonica. Paul wrote at least two letters to the church at Thessalonica, probably around 50AD. A city he had visited on his second missionary journey (Acts 17), Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia and under Roman rule, but was a free-city and basically allowed to rule itself within certain limits. In Paul's day it had a population of over 200,000 people and was considered "The Mother of all Macedonia". But Thessalonica as a whole did not accept Christianity. While a small group did, Paul's ministry was not accepted by either Jews or Gentiles so he had to escape to Berea and then to Athens (Acts 17:10-15). This left a small group of believers who were probably heavily persecuted and easily influenced. Paul's letters to them are both instructional and encouraging (1 Thessalonians 2:17). Often called "The Eschatological Epistles" Paul spends time in each letter describing end-times events. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul describes the coming Rapture, the "catching-up" of believers to Jesus. Recall from our previous lesson, we studied the four most common views of Rapture timing (Pre, Mid, Pre-Wrath, Post) and I gave my thoughts on where I fall relative to a pre-Tribulational Rapture. We also discussed that Revelation chapter 5 points to a pre-Tribulational Rapture through the Twenty-Four Elders who sang a "new song" of those redeemed by the Lamb's blood. This indicates to me that the Twenty-Four Elders are the raptured church who are in heaven just prior to the Tribulation. That's why the timing of the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is important to understand as a link to the rise of the antichrist described by Paul in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

Paul wrote his second letter partly because someone had confused the early converts in Thessalonica. Remember, they did not have the whole Bible like we do today and so were "learning as they go" so to speak. Paul's letters were part of that learning but somehow the church had still been led astray by the teaching of someone else. In verse 2:1 Paul looks back at his prior teaching in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and reminds them they will be "...gathered to Him...", and comforts them not to be "...unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report of letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come." (2 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul doesn't provide any details but obviously the church had been confused by other teaching or maybe even by a false letter sent to them that had supposed to have come from Paul. Their confusion seems to be that the Rapture might have already occurred and they were now living in the Tribulation. Paul had already encouraged them with his teaching on the Rapture, and now he was clarifying the fact that the Tribulation will not occur until the work of the antichrist begins. As we studied in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, Jesus provided a high-level summary of end-times events in what we know as the Olivet Discourse. There Jesus confirmed there will be wars, rumors of wars, persecution, natural disasters and false-prophets. But He explains that the full wrath of God will not be released on man until "...you see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel..." (Matthew 24:15). This is the revealing of the antichrist that had not come. Certainly apostasy and rebellion against God has always existed and exists in-spades today, but here Paul speaks to more than just the rebellion of man. Paul speaks of a single man, a lawless man, a man who will be doomed to destruction (Revelation 20:10), but before he is, will "...exalt himself over everything that is God.". In doing so he will set "...himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This

singular act, this "...setting up..." and "...proclaiming himself to be God..." takes place in the temple in Jerusalem and is the event Jesus and Daniel spoke of as the "Abomination that causes Desolation" (Daniel 9:27 / Matthew 24:15). It is the event when the antichrist goes into the temple in Jerusalem and proclaims himself to be God. Paul's point was, obviously this has not happened, and the events leading up to this have not happened either. That means they had not missed the Rapture and were not living in the Tribulation. Certainly there was great apostasy on Earth, but the singularly wicked man who will be "anti" (against) everything related to the true Christ had not yet come on the stage. Obviously, we have the benefit of history to better understand this, but over time, events in the world and the rise of powerfully evil leaders could certainly have led us to believe the revealing of the antichrist could happen at any time. I'm sure Christians felt that way during the times of multiple occupations, during the slaughter of Jews by the Romans, the murder of six million Jews by Hitler, and even the rise of islamic influenced antisemitism today. But as Paul indicates the end will not occur until God's restraining force is removed and the beast of Revelation is revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:6 / Rev 17:17).

But what or who is "...holding him back..." until "...he is taken out of the way..."? Commentators disagree. Some believe it is human government, or the preaching of the gospel, or Israel, the Rapture of the church (where my heart lands), or the Holy Spirit, or the archangel Michael. We just don't know. But what we do know is that the antichrist will be revealed in God's perfect timing at the mid-point of the Tribulation. At that point satan will have his man in a place of unbelievable power so that "...in accordance with the work of satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit [anti] miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing..." (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

In addition to focusing on who the antichrist is, it might also be beneficial to focus on who he is not. He's not a sinister figure like Darth Vader, wearing all black and with an evil voice. He's not a villain lurking in a dark corner ready to pounce on an unexpected passer-by, and he's not some type of evil demon with a pitch-fork and horns. To the contrary, he will probably be a popular political leader. He will be well known, charismatic, well-spoken and probably handsome. He'll be everyone's view of a powerful leader and peacemaker. He'll be so influential he'll be able to garner a truce between Israel and the world. He'll control politics as he seeks world power and at some point he'll control commerce, financing and banking. He will be fooled by all and loved by many. And then, at the mid-point of the Tribulation he will be revealed for the evil he is and he will wreak havoc on earth until he is destroyed by Jesus, by the very "...breath of his mouth..."

LESSON 34

The antichrist, lesson 4

We'll now conclude our study of the antichrist. The purpose of spending so much time on one character is to prepare us for our study of the Tribulation; the seven year period of time (Daniel's Seventieth Week) when the antichrist seeks to gain worldwide power for his master satan. We cannot adequately describe what the antichrist will do in just one lesson. But going forward we'll take an amazing journey through several books of the Old and New Testaments, and most clearly through chapters 6 to 19 in Revelation to understand more about his role and his activities. So to give us at least a basic understanding we have already discussed:

- What is an antichrist?
- Why is there an antichrist?
- Who is the antichrist?"

And now we'll complete our study with:

"What will the antichrist do?"

In the broadest sense the antichrist will do whatever satan commands. As we've discussed, satan will attempted to establish a parallel hierarchy to God, with himself in the Father's position, the antichrist replacing the Messianic Son and the false-prophet basically serving the role of the Holy Spirit. This conflict began in Genesis 3:15 when God put enmity between the seed of Eve (Jesus) and the seed of satan. His "seed" is sin that will eventually embody its evilness in the person of the antichrist. Once the church and its influence is removed (by the Rapture) satan will intensify his sinful influence like never before. To do so he will establish a man -- in a sin-driven messianic-type role -- to carry out his plans. In thinking about the antichrist's role I'm reminded of my favorite strengthening passage, Ephesians 6:10-18. There Paul tells us to "...be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power...", by putting on "...the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes". Here He reminds us that our true battle in life is not against man, but is against "...the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms..." (6:10-12). This describes the dangers of sin and our daily battles against it, but even more, it describes the satanically-influenced leaders, governments and nations who will eventually culminate in the short but profoundly sinful reign of the antichrist.

We get an early glimpse of the antichrist's actions in Revelation 6 when we see the first four judgment elements released on earth. These are sometimes called "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", but personally I don't believe the riders in these verses is the antichrist himself. But I do believe they represent the deceitful and destructive power that comes on the earth, as Jesus begins His initial judgments and the antichrist begins to come on the scene. These horsemen parallel the warnings of Christ in Matthew 24:4-8 as they materialize through the first four seals of chapter 6:

1. The deception of peace - the rider on a white horse (Matthew 24:4-5)
2. Which is quickly followed by War - the rider on a red horse (Matthew 24:6-7)
3. Which brings on Famine - the rider on the black horse (Matthew 24:7)

4. And ends in Death - the rider on the pale horse (Matthew 24:7)

Jesus describes these events as "...the beginning of birth pangs..." -- The early contractions of pain as God's judgment comes upon the earth (Matthew 24:8). We'll study these seal-released powers in much more detail once we get to chapter 6, but I mention them here as a description of the environment in which the antichrist will begin to show his power --- an environment planned for and executed by Jesus. These events and their sequence -- false peace, war, famine and death -- creates a situation where people will seek relief from their suffering. This will enable a false messiah, the antichrist, to come on the scene and offer his false promises to anyone who will follow him.

It is during this time of Tribulation where false peace quickly erupts into war, followed by disease and then death when the antichrist will rise as a leader. It's not clear exactly how this happens but I personally lean towards the idea that he will rise after the Rapture from a re-kindled Roman Empire that emerges from a unified Europe. Whatever his origin, once established he will "...confirm a covenant [treaty] with many for one seven." (Daniel 9:27). The Bible isn't clear who the "...many..." are but it certainly includes Israel. We know this because Israel will be allowed to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and re-establish the Old Testament sacrificial system.

Once established as a supreme leader, the antichrist will seek to rule the world. He will form a government, with worldwide and autonomous political and religious power. It will be a system of evil infrastructure known in Revelation as "Babylon The Great - The Mother of Prostitutes". That name alone should give you a clear idea as to how the world will have degraded by this point (Revelation 12 / 13:2 / 17:5). During this time of great need the people of the earth will flock to the antichrist for help. He will convince them of his messianic-like position by "...use of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie..." (2 Thessalonians 2:9). He will then be joined by a second beast, the false-prophet, who comes from within the earth. He too uses "...great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in the view of the people." (Revelation 13:13). Because of this literally billions of people will worship the antichrist as a god, "The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon [satan] because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, 'Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?'" (Revelation 13:3-4). These followers of satan will "...receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads..." - possibly the number 666 (Revelation 13:16-18). Without this mark people cannot buy or sell food or the essentials of life. They will be outcasts, enemies of the antichrist and will be killed. "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." (Matthew 24:9). We will see this after the Fifth Seal is opened and the slain believers will cry out to God, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the earth and avenge our blood." (Revelation 6:10). To me this indicates not all people will follow the antichrist. There will be the remnant - who I believe are saved after the Rapture and during the Tribulation - through the gospel shared by the 144,000 converted Jews (Revelation 7), the Two Witnesses (Revelation 11) and the proclaiming angel (Revelation 14:6). These are the people, many of them martyrs, "...who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 20:4). They are the "...the saints who obey God's commands and remain faithful to Jesus." (Revelation 14:12).

It appears from Revelation and Ezekiel that this cycle of war, famine, death and persecution will continue for most of the Tribulation period until its climax at what we know as The Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16). But it is before that, at the middle of the seven year Tribulation; the 3 1/2 year point, the 42 months, 1260 days, "time, times and half a time", when the antichrist will show his true colors (Daniel 11:11). At that point he "...will put an end to sacrifice and offering [speaking specifically of Israel]. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation until the end that is decreed is poured out on him..." (Daniel 9:27). This is the time Jesus talks about in Matthew 24:15-16, "...when you will see standing in the holy place the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel." This is the antichrist who will "...set himself up in God's temple, proclaiming to be God." (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This is when Israel will flee into the mountains where God will have a "...place prepared for her [Israel] in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach." (Matthew 24:16 / Revelation 12:14). Israel is at this point finally recognizes who Jesus really is and God takes them to a place of refuge - the remnant of His chosen people. --- That is so cool.

The information in this lesson only scratches the surface of what the antichrist will do. We'll dig much deeper as we work our way through chapters 6 through 19, but even with our limited exposure so far we can clearly see how the antichrist will become the most evil and satanically-influenced person to ever live. Emerging during a time of false peace (the period of the white horse) he will quickly make himself known, and as God's punishment comes upon the earth the beast will rise in a messiah-like role to form a universal government, a false world-wide religion and wreak havoc on all who confront him. It is during this time he will declare himself to be God and turn his attention to the destruction of all remnant believers; particularly Israel. War will ensue with some nations following the antichrist, and some fighting against him. At the same time this is happening Jesus continues to release the remaining seals of judgment, the blasting destruction of the seven trumpets, and finally He pours out His earth-destroying bowls of cataclysmic holy wrath against all of creation. Through this Babylon, the empire of the antichrist will be destroyed. Then the beast and "...the kings of the earth and their armies...", "...were killed with the sword that came out of the Rider on the horse...", the Rider, "...called faithful and True" with "...eyes like blazing fire..." who will "...strike down the nations..." (Revelation 18/19). This describes Jesus in one of the holiest of His victorious moments when He returns to stand upon the earth and bring destruction to all sin. It is then the beast and the false profit "...were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur..." to be "...tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 19:20 / 20:10).

But keep in mind, as difficult as it may be to grasp, all of the events we will study in Revelation are not only known to God, they are part of His perfect plan to bring judgment upon His disobedient and denying creation. In fact, as we will see beginning in chapter 6 it is Jesus who breaks the seals, opens the scroll and releases a series of twenty-one increasingly destructive judgments upon man. And as He does one of the angelic Four Living Creatures will "...say in a voice like thunder, 'Come!'". Not only is the angel announcing the arrival of the first destructive elements, but he is literally calling them forth! We must also remember that no matter how powerful and influential satan and his followers are --- God is always in control. Even though God has allowed satan the opportunity to tempt man to sin, He does so while also providing the free gift of atoning grace and salvation through the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ -- our ultimate King.

Why are we so confident in that? Because as Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end, He will stand upon the earth." (Job 1:6-8 / 19:25).

LESSON 35

Introduction to Revelation, Chapter 6

We've now completed a short study of the "Seventy Weeks of Daniel" and the antichrist. Now as we start chapter 6 you'll begin to see why it was necessary to study these topics in so much detail. With this background we'll better understand the complex characters and events we will see going forward.

But before we start chapter 6 let's clear-up some potential confusion --- Despite what you might read on the internet the COVID-19 virus was not an indication that the seven seals are being opened. Certainly this is a terrible virus that spread at an alarming rate, but if the seals were being opened we would already be in the Tribulation and as we will see in chapter 6, all kinds of amazingly catastrophic things would be happening. More importantly, I don't believe we, as believers, will still be here on earth when all of that starts happening because the church will be raptured before God brings His wrath upon the earth. Also, as we'll soon see, the plagues discussed in chapter 6 come after a time of worldwide false-peace, (which of course has not yet happened), plus there will be a time of worldwide war like we've never seen before.

COVID-19 was a terrible situation, but as far as it being a sign that judgment seals are being opened, let's put COVID-19 in perspective...

Throughout history it is estimated that 300 to 500 million people have died from viruses and plagues. Here are just a few of many examples:

- In 165 AD the Antonine Plague quickly spread through Italy, Egypt and Greece killing an estimated 5 million people. This was one of many "small" pandemics that ravaged the ancient world.
- The Plague of Justinian in 541AD swept through the Mediterranean nation-states killing 25 million people in a single year. At one point over 5,000 people a day died in Constantinople, which by the time the virus had run its course had lost 40% of its population.
- Between 1346 to 1353 the most famous (or infamous) pandemic of all time, the Black Plague, attacked Europe, Asia and Africa killing an estimated 200 million people. Spread by bacteria carried on fleas who were then carried on rats, it traveled west along the famous Silk Road and north on merchant ships from Africa and the Mediterranean. By 1353 the Black Plague is believed to have killed up to 60% of Europe's total population. Some areas were hit so hard their population did not recover until the 19th century - 600 years later.
- Documented flu outbreaks of 1889, 1956 and 1968 killed over 4 million people. There were hundreds more outbreaks over the centuries that were never recorded.
- In 1918 the Spanish Flu quickly traveled around the world killing over 50 million people. So many people died in the United States that in one year the average per-capita age dropped 12 years.
- First identified in the Republic of the Congo in 1976 the HIV/AIDS virus has killed over 36 million people worldwide. Today over 35 million people are living with HIV including 5% of the total population of Africa -- which is about 21 million people.
- And within just the last 10 years, the Middle Eastern MERSCoV, MERSA, Congolese Ebola, H1N1, E-Coli, Avian Flu, Dengue Fever, Salmonella Agona, Cholera, Marburg virus and

Polio, are just a few of the dozens of viruses and diseases that have killed millions of people around the world.

Clearly, COVID-19 was a terrible thing, but it is not the plague of Revelation 6 and not the sign that the scroll is open. That will happen when Christ opens the fourth seal. -- "I looked and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named death and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague..." (Revelation 6:8). -- Based on today's population one fourth of the world means over two billion (2,000,000,000) people will be killed in a very short period of time. But even if COVID-19 is not an indication that judgment seals have been opened, it is a reminder that judgment is coming and we should hasten to share the gospel of Jesus while there is time.

Now, let's quickly recap chapters 1 through 5 before we go to chapter 6.

In chapter 1 Jesus told the apostle John -- "Write, therefore, what you have seen [the past], what is now [the present] and what will take place later" [the future] (Revelation 1:19). Chapters 1 through 3 cover the past and present through their introduction of John and characterization of the church. Chapters 4 and 5 begin to show the future by recounting John's visit to heaven and by giving us a view of the pre-judgment activities of God. Chapter 4 is key because we're introduced to the Twenty-Four Elders who arguably represent the church immediately after the Rapture. Chapter 5 gives us an even more vivid view of God's throne room, the heavenly host, the seven sealed scroll, the coming mood of judgment and the Lamb who is singularly worthy and able to open the scroll and reveal God's end-time plan. Now as we enter chapter 6 two things occur. First, we're leaving John's visit to heaven in chapters 4 and 5 and returning to a view of earth. From here until the end of Revelation the story shifts to the final enmity between Christ and Satan as the enemy seeks to bring sin upon all creation like we have never seen before (Genesis 3:15). But more importantly, chapter 6 begins the judgment of all creation as Jesus, the Worthy Lamb of chapter 5, begins to break the seven seals of the scroll, and in doing so releases His holy judgments in ever increasing levels of destruction.

To further refresh your memory here are a few other take-aways from chapters 1-5.

Chapter 1

(Introduction)

- God's "Revelation" is not only about end-times events, but it is also the revealing of Jesus as we've never seen Him before --- as He, the Holy Lamb in chapter 5, becomes the instrument of God's final judgment beginning in chapter 6.
- Revelation provides a promised blessing to all who read it, hear it and take it to heart. Sadly, this is a blessing the majority of Christians will never seek and most pastors will never preach.
- When he writes Revelation, John is in his 90's and is being held as a prisoner of the Roman Empire in a penal colony on the Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. To me his situation can be an encouragement to all of us. God assigned John to chronicle the final actions of judgment and write the final book of the Bible, yet God puts him on a prison island to do so. But despite his situation and suffering John did it, just like he was asked. So the next time you find yourself on a Patmos in life be alert to what God wants you to do while you're there --- then go do it.

- And now we begin to see Jesus in ways we have not seen Him before. With blazing eyes, feet of bronze and a voice like thunder. This is the divine Judge and warrior who is preparing to bring God's wrath upon all creation.

Chapters 2 and 3

(The Character of the Church)

- John is told to give these revelations to seven churches -- and through them to the "church" through all ages. These are groups of people who characterize the spiritual maturity or disobedience of the church over time.
- These are seven real churches with real people in real cities in Asia Minor.
- As members of the "church" these letters are written to us too and through their commendations and condemnations we are given clear guidance to follow and sins to avoid.
- Key to this is the fact that of the seven churches only two are obedient. The rest, as we can still see today across "Christian" denominations, have forgotten why they are Christians in the first place, because they have forgotten about Jesus.
- These churches show that even a churches hard work, toil, perseverance and love, even in the name of Jesus, can all be for naught if we don't understand that Jesus is our only focus.

Chapter 4

(John's view of Heaven)

- John's view of heaven's glory is stunning and profound. We must ponder on what he sees in chapter 4 in order to fully appreciate what he sees in chapter 5. Just like us, this heavenly view in chapters 4 and 5 will prepare him for the earthly view he will see starting in chapter 6.
- Here we meet the Twenty Four Elders, who (at least in my mind) represent the Raptured church.
- We also meet the Four Living Creatures who closely guard the throne of God. We will see both of these groups many times as we work through Revelation and observe their role in God's wrath on man.

Chapter 5

(The Worthy Lamb)

In chapter 5 we meet two new Revelation characters:

The Mighty Angel

- The angels around the throne
- John wept when he thought they would find no one worthy enough to open the sealed scrolls and bring judgment on sin and satan.
- But he must have jumped for joy when he realized the Lamb he saw is Jesus, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the

Worthy One. It is He and He alone who is worthy to open the scroll and implement God's plan of wrath.

Introduction to Chapter 6

Chapter 6 begins the seven year period known as the "Tribulation". If you'll recall from our earlier lessons, God gave Daniel a vision of Seventy "Weeks" of future time. Through our study we learned that each "week" is actually a measure of seven years, not days, which gives us seventy periods of seven years each -- or 490 years (based on the 360 day Hebrew calendar). Also, we learned we can account for sixty-nine of those seven year periods - or 483 years - from the decree of Artaxerxes on March 14th 445BC to rebuild Jerusalem until the Triumphal Entry of Christ on April 6th, 32AD. This leaves one "week", the seventieth seven year period, unaccounted for. But as we will now see, this missing week is the seven year period known as the Tribulation that starts with chapter 6. We don't know when these last seven years will occur, but we know It comes at the end of the church-age. A period of time also called "The Time of Jacob's Troubles" (Jacob being Israel - Jeremiah 30:7). A time when Israel and the world come under severe judgment, from which Israel eventually turns to God and recognizes Jesus as the true Messiah, and the remnant of the unbelieving world and creation itself is destroyed. The seventieth week, the Tribulation, is divided into two 3-1/2 year periods. Specific events occur during each of the 3-1/2 year segments with the second 3-1/2 period often called the "Great Tribulation" when God blasts and pours final destruction upon all creation. The beginning of the Tribulation is the point when the antichrist begins to come to power (Revelation 6:2 / Matthew 24:4 / Daniel 9:26-27), and God releases the first four Seals of judgment. At the 3-1/2 year mid-point the antichrist will declare himself to be God in the temple in Jerusalem, an action called "The Abomination of the Desolation" (Daniel 9:27). From this point until the end of year seven God will release His most cataclysmic destructive forces through the final "Seals", seven "Trumpets" and seven "Bowls". This all starts in chapter 6.

The beginning of chapter 6 marks the beginning of the end. This is the beginning of last seven year "week" prophesied in Daniel chapter 9, when Jesus will begin to release twenty-one judgments upon all creation and all mankind. Chapter 6 is basically a summary of what we'll see as we work our way through chapters 7 through 19. Chapter 6 covers the opening of the first six seals, and sets the stage for what we're about to see. Although it is certainly debatable, I'm going to approach the start of chapter 6 as occurring after the Rapture.

The events in chapter 6 parallel the prophecy of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The first four seals (Revelation 6:1-8) parallel the prophecy in Matthew 24:3-8. The beginning of the overall Tribulation; a period Jesus called "...the beginning of sorrows" (KJV).

LESSON 36

Continuation of Revelation chapter 6

Chapter 6, Lesson 2

Our prior lesson provided a quick recap of chapters 1 through 5, an overview of what we'll see in chapter 6, and my personal thoughts on why the COVID-19 pandemic is not an indication the seals of God's judgment scroll have been opened.

And with that we can begin to unpack chapter 6.

Chapter 6, verse 1-2

1. "I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the Four Living Creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2. I looked and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest."

6:1a. - "I watched..."

At the end of chapter 5 John is still in heaven, and when Jesus is revealed as the Lamb of God, who is worthy to open the scroll, the heavenly host knew the time of judgment had come. This is when John - "...heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying 'To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever.' The Four Living Creatures said, 'Amen,' and the elders fell down and worshiped." (Revelation 5:12-13) -- This amazing view sets the stage as John will now "...watch..." as the future judgment unfolds.

6:1b. - "...as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals."

The Lamb of God, Jesus, the Holy One, is the only one worthy to open the scroll - the title deed to creation - and in doing so reveals God's final plan for the destruction of sin (Revelation 5:6-10). As we have studied, the scroll has seven seals. As these are broken they release a series of judgments that come in more rapid succession near the end and bring increasingly more catastrophic destruction. When Jesus opens the final seventh "Seal" it will release seven "Trumpet" judgments, and when the seventh Trumpet blast comes it will release seven "Bowl" judgments -- for a total of twenty-one judgment actions. As you wrap your mind around this I think it's safe to view:

- The seven "Seals" as revealing the "environment" in which judgments will take place - false-peace, war, famine, pestilence, death, martyrdom and destruction. These Seals take us through the mid-point of the Tribulation, the full emergence of the antichrist and then at the sixth Seal to a time when "...the sun will be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven..." (Matthew 24:29 / Revelation 6:12-13).
- After this the seventh Seal opens the seven "Trumpets" as they blast even greater and more rapid judgments.
- And then the seventh Trumpet opens the seven "Bowls" as God pours His final judgments upon creation.

6:1.c - "...Then I heard..."

Recall from 1:3 the blessing of Revelation goes to those who read it, hear it and take it to heart. Similarly, John tells us in the first part of this verse what he sees "watched" (sort of like "read", which requires seeing), and now John tells us what he hears. John is blessed by the prophetic vision he is given by Jesus, and now we receive a blessing when he shares with us what he sees and hears. I believe this is indication that Jesus gives John more than a simple vision. I believe the seeing and hearing may indicate God took John into the future so he could - "Write, therefore, what you have seen..." (1:19). This is debatable but tends to be where my heart lands, because several times John mentions the physical actions of seeing and hearing.

6:1.d. - "...one of the Four Living Creatures..."

We've already discussed, the Four Living Creatures (4:6). These are angelic beings who function close to the throne of God. They are mentioned several times in Revelation either participating in worship or taking part in administering judgments. For example, in 15:7 they "...gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God..." (Refer to Revelation 4:8-11 / 5:8-14 / 6:1-5 / 7:11 / 19:4 // Isaiah 6:1-3 // Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10). Obviously, they play a key role in the judgment events.

6:1.e. - "...say in a voice like thunder..."

In chapter 4 John saw and heard the profound scenes of heaven. This included "From the throne came flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder." (4:5). We discussed this in depth in an earlier lesson and cited multiple scripture references of lightning and thunder; most often to indicate the mood of God. In this case that mood would be associated with the coming final wrath of judgment. Tellingly, we will see these same words used when the seventh angel pours the final Bowl of judgment on creation and says "It is done!" Then came flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake." (Revelation 16:17-18). This is the mood of heaven at the end of wrath after all twenty-one Seals, Trumpets and Bowls have been administered. But here in chapter 6 we see the beginning of wrath - the first of the twenty-one - when one of the Four Living Creatures represents the judgment mood with "...a voice like thunder..."

6:1.f. - "Come!"

This is profound. The angelic being of God, at the first action of the Lamb's revealed judgment says "Come!" (KJV "Come and see"). The creature calls to John to come and see the evil who comes from God's first seal. But to me it also indicates that Jesus has opened the first seal and in doing so has called forth the first of His judgment events.

6:2a. - "...I looked and there before me was a white horse!..."

Over time, the interpretation of this has been debated. Some believe the white horse represents the coming of Christ. But that's not how it speaks to my heart -- as we'll see more clearly in 6:2b below. The word horse is used five times in the book of Revelation. The first four to illustrate the evil powers of the first four Seals and the fifth to represent the holy power of Jesus as He returns to earth for the final battle to defeat sin and satan. In terms of chapter 6 I don't view the rider on this first white horse as Jesus and I don't view them as actual horses. I believe the term is used to represent the powers or forces that come quickly on the scene, galloping so to say, as they bring their evil to create a sin-ridden environment. Here I believe they help us understand this is a force to be reckoned with.

6:2b. - "Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest."

The rest of the verse is closely connected so let's break-down each term as one thought.

-- "Its rider..."

As stated above, some commentators view the rider on the white horse as Christ. Personally, I don't. Certainly Christ will return on a white horse (Revelation 19:11), but I don't think this is the same. I believe the white horse and rider in chapter 6 is the deception Jesus talks about in Matthew 24:4 - "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming 'I am the messiah.' and will deceive many.". As we learned in our lessons on the antichrist there are many false-prophets and teachers who are against (anti) Christ (1 John 2:18-22). But in the end-times a single satan-led person will emerge from the gaggle of false-prophets who will attempt to deceive the world that he is the messiah they need. This person, who seeks to take the place of the true Messiah, will be the antichrist. Other commentators view the rider in chapter 6 (and the other three riders) as the antichrist himself. It may be, but I tend to think of the colored horses and their riders (with various roles) as the power and forces that create the "environment" that enables the antichrist to assume power. These are the forces, released by Christ, that enable the antichrist to do the things he is prophesied to do.

So let's think about this for a minute. Ephesians 6:10-18 tells us to put on the full armor of God. But in doing so it reminds us that "...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, [man] but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." --- This describes spiritual warfare at its worst, and this is what we see being revealed here in chapter 6. But we must remember that nothing, not even the most vile sin of the end-times will take God by surprise. In fact, God will allow these events to occur as satan attempts one last time to bring the whole world under his control. We know this because long before it ever happens Jesus is already showing John the events He knows will take place. And...since nothing happens without God's sovereign authority, these events are part of His plan.

-- "...held a bow..."

Interestingly, the rider has a bow (a weapon of war) but no arrows. I believe this is the deceptive false-peace Daniel speaks of in his prophetic vision of the antichrist - "He [antichrist] will confirm a covenant with many for one seven..." (Daniel 9:27). This is undoubtedly a covenant of peace, but who is the "...many..."? Probably all nations as the antichrist seeks to rule the world, but most importantly Israel (Revelation 19:15). Why do we know he will make peace with Israel? Because they will have been allowed to rebuild the third temple, on the temple mount, which is currently partly held by muslims, and will have re-instituted the Old Testament sacrificial system. In 2 Thessalonians 2:4 Paul tells us the antichrist will "...set[s] himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." In order to do this the temple must be rebuilt, and in order to rebuild the temple there must be peace and protection for Israel -- potentially even for a time overcoming the muslim world.

But the peace that comes with the emergence of the antichrist is a false-peace. When Jesus said there will be many who come in His name, He is speaking of those who come as false-teachers with a false message, but the antichrist will be different because He will claim - "...I am the Messiah..." (Matthew 24:5), which will convince the disobedient Jews that he is truly their king -

- or at a minimum a protecting leader. I think the imagery of a bow with no arrows also points to the false-peace and the false covenant he will make with Israel "...for one seven...". But it will be a false-peace, a deceptive peace, a peace brought on by power (the bow) but initially without bloodshed (no arrows). It will also be a limited peace that ends - "In the middle of the seven when he will put an end to the sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." (Daniel 9:27). This will be the time when the antichrist shows his true evil and turns on Israel to destroy God's people. - "For when you see standing in the holy place [Mark 13:14 "...where it does not belong..."] the abomination that causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel -- let the reader understand -- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." (Matthew 24:15-16). This will be a time when the antichrist brings nations against Israel "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains..." (Luke 21:20-21). The time of great deception will be over, the antichrist's true mission will be fully revealed and the final judgments of God will be unleashed.

--- One final thought on the bow as it relates to this... I believe the bow indicates this deception because the bow is a weapon of distance warfare. It's not designed for close combat, where you come face-to-face with your opponent. Instead it's designed to attack your enemy from a distance; silently and stealthily. An attack you may not see coming, have no idea where it came from or who sent it in flight, and an attack almost impossible to avoid. It too is an attack of deception. Just like the deceptive peace of the antichrist.

-- "...and he was given a crown..."

He was "given" a crown. To me this doesn't indicate he will initially assume leadership by force, but by the approval of the people. Sort of a victor's crown given to the winner of a contest. Here that contest is the following of mankind to his deception. Remember again what Jesus said in the Olivet Discourse - "For many will come in my name [false teachers / preachers], claiming "I am the messiah.", "and will deceive many." "For false messiahs and false-prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonder to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24:5 and 24). Paul takes it one step further and clarifies that the false messiah Jesus is talking about is the antichrist - "The coming of the lawless one [antichrist] will be in accordance with how satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing." (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). But how will he deceive to this degree? Because God will allow this deception to be used as a method of judgment. Paul further explains this - "For this reason God sends them [man on earth during the Tribulation] a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness." (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12). Wow! God gave them a delusion not to believe? Why? Because this is the time of destruction when God will allow satan to roam like a lion one last time, but more powerfully than he has ever done before (1 Peter 5:8-11). This is a time similar to the wicked Paul spoke of in Romans when God "...gave them over to a depraved mind.(Romans 1:28). It is also a time similar to the judgment of Israel when their leader Ahab allowed the worship of baal. Then God enabled a spirit to "...go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouths of all his prophets", he said. "You will succeed in enticing him." Said the Lord. "Go and do it." "So now the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all the prophets of yours. The Lord has decreed disaster on you." (1 Kings 22, specifically 20-23).

-- "...and he rode out..."

This shows intentional actions. He "...rode out...", moved forward and took control. He is now seen as a leader, riding ahead of his army, his political system and his false religion.

-- "...as a conqueror bent on conquest."

To be "bent" with intention is to lean-in with focus and power. In this case he is intently focused on the total conquest of man.

At this point Jesus has broken the first seal and in doing so releases forces that will begin to bring judgment on man but will also support the rise of the antichrist. But the antichrist, like his father satan, is patient and deceiving. He allows the environment to enable a false-peace he will use to put Israel in a state of false-confidence. He will then turn on them in another of satan's efforts to destroy Israel.

LESSON 37

Continuation of Revelation chapter 6

Chapter 6, Lesson 3.

Quick Recap:

In lesson 2 we started into chapter 6 with a deep-dive of verse 1. In summary --- John's view of heaven ended with the heavenly host praising Jesus, the worthy Lamb because they knew the time of judgment had finally come (chapter 5). John was now transported to earth to see and hear the events of the future end-times as Christ breaks the first Seal. When He does, we see the imagery of a white horse and rider. A rider wearing a crown and carrying a bow but no arrows. We learned that the white horse and rider come before the forces and environment that enable the false-peace of the antichrist to flourish as he comes on the scene and establishes a treaty with Israel. He comes with a bow (a weapon of war), but with no arrows. This indicates he comes to conquer but initially without bloodshed. Instead, he will use deception, and as part of his plan he enables the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and re-institution of the Jewish sacrificial system. But this too is all part of his deception. The antichrist knows he will turn on Israel with the intent of destroying them all.

Here are some additional thoughts I had related to Jesus breaking the seals of the scroll...

We've studied the seven sealed scroll, but we didn't discuss how it will be opened. Well-known Revelation scholars are not in agreement on how the scroll is sealed. Some believe the scroll is somehow sealed from within and as Jesus unrolls the scroll He uncovers and breaks each of the seals as He reaches them. Others believe the scroll is sealed along the end so the seals are broken as the scroll is unrolled. But neither of those common views is where my heart lands.

Ancient documents were not sealed in either of these ways. They were rolled-up to form a tube and then seals (usually wax or clay) were applied where the final end of the paper overlaps the body of the scroll. They are applied along its length; not on the end or within the scroll. This ensured a sealed document that could only (legally) be opened by the person who had the right to break the seals. Sometimes the seals were separate and sometimes they were connected by a string, but at all times they were at the juncture where the final edge of the scroll overlaps the scroll's body.

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how the scroll is unrolled but I at least wanted to share my thoughts. As I see it Jesus breaks the 7 Seals in succession, one after another, and as He does judgments are released. The Bible doesn't say the judgments are released as the scroll is unrolled, but when He opens or breaks each Seal. If this is the case then it would not be until He breaks the last Seal that the scroll could begin to fully unroll, and as it does it releases its contents; the 7 Trumpet blasts and 7 Bowl judgments that are inside. Then at the release of the final Bowl judgment the scroll is fully opened and the angel says "It is done!" (Revelation 16:17). What is done? I think he may mean the scroll is completely unrolled and the final scroll judgments are fully released.

Maybe it's a moot point because the Bible doesn't say, but at least in my mind breaking all 7 seals before the scroll is unrolled:

- Would be clearly understood by anyone who had ever watched a sealed scroll being opened.
- It would eliminate the need to come up with some other type of scroll-sealing technique that is unlike the way it was historically done.
- And it would bring a feeling of anticipation that comes as we wait for all of the seals to be broken in order to reveal what is within the document.

Again, I'm not saying this is the case, because the Bible is not clear, but I wanted to share how it speaks to me.

Now, let's continue with the second of the four horsemen.

Chapter 6, verse 3-4

3. "When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" 4. "Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other. To him was given a large sword."

The word Apocalypse comes from the Greek term meaning "An unveiling or unfolding of what is previously unknown" and generally as it applies to a situation of total destruction - as in the Book of Revelation. The title of Revelation in Greek is "Apokalypsis", which literally means "Removal of a Veil". That's why you might sometimes hear the four horses and their riders in chapter 6 called "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." Their role is to begin God's judgment as they are revealed through the opening of the seven sealed scroll. This might have been hard to imagine if we only had the example of the white horse and rider we studied last week -- the rider who brought a bloodless peace -- but now with the second rider we can certainly see why they play a key role in judgment.

6:3a. - "When the lamb opened the second seal..."

The Bible doesn't tell us how long the false-peace in verse 1-2 lasted. Certainly long enough to rebuild the temple and reinstate the Jewish sacrificial system. But that will happen very quickly because all four of the horse and rider events in chapter 6 seem to take place before the mid-point of the Tribulation. Even so, the environment established by the last three riders will probably last through most of the entire seven years. So given the fact the mid-point comes at 3 1/2 years the horse and rider events must occur fairly quickly.

6:3b. - "...I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"

As with the first Seal another of the Four Living Creatures takes part in announcing the arrival of the second judgment element.

6:4a. - "Then another horse came out, a fiery red one."

As we've discussed, horses are mentioned several times in the Bible as a symbol of force or power. For example, four sets of horses are mentioned in Zechariah 6:2, including red ones who are pulling a chariot sent by God for judgment against Israel's enemies. Some commentators believe the two

mountains mentioned in this passage are Mt. Zion and the Mount of Olives. If so, that is the same location of Christ's final judgment battle when "On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west..." (Zechariah 14:4). This is the time prophesied by Zechariah when the True Shepherd Jesus will defeat the "foolish-shepherd", the antichrist. A time when Israel finally recognizes Jesus as the true Messiah, and when - "They will call on my Name and I will answer them; I will say 'They are my people', and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" (Zechariah 13:9).

6.4b. - "...Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make people kill each other..."

The horse's red color indicates bloodshed and war which is the rider's primary task. This is the time proscribed by Jesus when He said - "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars..." "...Nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." (Matthew 24:6-7). The time of false-peace has ended and the time of judgment has come. The first rider brought peace, a false-peace, which probably caused people to take down their guard and become complacent. This will probably happen to Israel when they feel protected and are allowed to rebuild the temple and reinstate the sacrificial system. Now the antichrist's true intentions are released when worldwide war breaks out. This will include both cold wars ("...rumors of war...") and active war, but eventually "...Nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." (Matthew 24:6-7) and all-out war will encircle the globe. This will signify the beginning of "birth pangs" spoke of by Jesus in Matthew 24:8 (Mark 13:7 / Luke 21:9). Here God uses the symbolism of birth pangs that increase in frequency and strength as they near their conclusion. So too the birth pangs of judgment will start here with war and death and continue forward occurring faster and faster and with more pain and destruction as they are revealed by the remaining Seals, Trumpets and Bowls.

But note something in this verse that can be difficult to grasp, "...Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth...". Pay attention to the words "given" and "take". The power to make war is given to him, and then he takes away peace by using this power. This is the power of satan and his antichrist will use to establish his base-of-power and source of fear. Remember, verses 1-2 said the rider (symbolizing the antichrist) will be a conqueror "bent" on conquering, but he brought no arrows. He started his conquest with diplomacy and political power, but now in verses 3-4 he brings war to earth so he can conquer and "...to make people kill each other...". As you can imagine, this environment will bring fear, dread, hatred and vengeance as satan uses the sinful nature of post-rapture mankind to fight one another as the antichrist solidifies his position of power. --- But, keep in mind, all of this is under the authority of God, is released by Christ, and is part of His divine plan to bring destruction on sinful man. It's difficult enough to grasp what comes out of each Seal, but it's even harder to grasp the fact that Jesus is the one who releases it as part of God's plan for judgment. But this is the true sovereignty of our Almighty God. A God who can use all forces and actions for His intended purpose and glory.

6.4c. - "...To him was given a large sword."

Opposite of a bow, which is used to attack your enemy silently and stealthily from a distance, now this rider brings a sword. A short weapon of hand-to-hand and face-to-face combat. This is a weapon that requires one to see who he is killing - up close and personal - plus it ensures the ones being killed are able to see their conqueror revealed. In this case it is a "large" sword which probably indicates significant destructive force. A force indicated by the type of warfare prophesied by Daniel, which originally described the historical attacks on Israel by Antiochus

Epiphanes, who committed the first "Abomination that causes desolation". But it also appears to be a prophetic view of the future antichrist - the "little horn" in Daniel 7:8, as he brings war on mankind. -- "In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue, will rise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power." (Daniel 8:23-25). This points to the description of the antichrist we will see in Revelation 13 when, - "It [the antichrist] was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the world will worship the beast [antichrist] - all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain before the creation of the world." (Revelation 13:7-8).

The second horseman, the rider on the red horse now brings war. War like the earth has never seen before. Prompted by the first rider who initiated a false-peace, now the second rider capitalizes on that peace to turn on Israel as his prime target of destruction.

LESSON 38

Chapter 6, Lesson 4

Quick Recap:

- Lesson 1 - Overview of chapter 6
- Lesson 2 - Verses 1-2 - The first Seal is opened - A white horse and rider brings peace -- but a false peace.
- Lesson 3 - Verses 3-4 - The second Seal is opened - A red horse and rider brings global war.
- Lesson 4 - Verses 5-6 - The third Seal is opened.

Chapter 6, verses 5-6

5. "When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. 6. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the Four Living Creatures, saying, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages (KJV "for a penny"), and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and wine!"

5a. "When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse!"

Jesus now opens the third seal and as He does the contents are announced by a third member of the Four Living Creatures. I find it interesting that each of the Four Living Creatures play a specific role. We will see them further engage as we move through Revelation.

But before we look in detail at the third horsemen let's quickly recall what the first two riders brought:

- The first, on a white horse, brought the promise of peace. We learned this will be a false-peace probably acquired through deceitful political diplomacy --- this is indicated by the fact he is a conqueror but his bow has no arrows.
- The second rider, on a red horse, brought a large sword and with the power he was given took peace away from the earth and brought devastating war.
- Both of these begin the final judgments of God - the "...beginning of birth pangs..." spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24:8. But they also serve to create the environment needed for the rise of the satanic antichrist.

Now we see the third horse, a black horse, but what does its rider bring?

5b. - "Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand."

The rider's scale is used for measuring weight. But what is he measuring? --- Food. The presence of the scale and the narrative later in this verse indicates what the third rider brings --- Famine. The first horse brought deceptive peace which was forcibly taken away and replaced by the second rider's war. Now war and its worldwide destruction of people, land, crops, factories, infrastructure and economy brings famine. A famine that will spread across the earth with lightning speed, killing as it goes. A famine like the world has never seen before. A famine greater than the hundreds that have been recorded across time.

The Bible records many famines; using the word 96 times in the KJV. Sometimes they are used by God to punish His disobedient people or their enemies, or at other times it appears God used them to move people where He wanted them to be for His purposes.

Here are just a few examples:

- A famine in Canaan forced Abram to flee into Egypt. But Abram went to Egypt without God's guidance or direction and his ordeal became a lesson in protection and trust. (Genesis chapter 12).
- There was famine at the time Joseph was in Egypt. The land survived because Joseph convinced the Pharaoh to stockpile supplies during seven years of plenty in order to prepare for seven years of famine. It was also famine that drove Joseph's father Jacob and his brothers to Egypt where for 400 years the future nation of Israel would multiply. (Genesis chapters 41-44).
- In the days of the Judges a great famine drove Naomi to Moab from where she brought back Ruth, who married Boaz, who had a child Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of king David, and therefore in the earthly lineage of Jesus (Ruth 4:13-22).
- During the reign of king David God sent a famine on the land because Saul had killed the Gibeonites. The famine didn't end until the Gibeonites were avenged (2 Samuel 21:1).
- Then in another prophetically tragic proclamation the Lord says to Israel, "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will send famine through the land - not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:11). As a result of Israel's disobedience God went silent for about 400 years (the Intertestamental Period); a time when He sent no prophets and spoke no words to His people. It was not until the ministry of John the Baptist that God spoke again to his disobedient nation; when He used John to announce the coming of the Messiah who would offer God's grace through His Son (Malachi 3:1 / Matthew 3:1-3). I mention this "famine" because we'll see silence in heaven again just before Jesus breaks the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1).

6.a. - " Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the Four Living Creatures..."

Interesting wording, "...what sounded like a voice...". We already know the Four Living Creatures can communicate with John because they have told him to "Come!". But now John apparently hears one of them (or someone else who is among them?) not only inviting John to watch what is happening but now he narrates what John is seeing to ensure he clearly understands its meaning.

6.b. - "...saying, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages (KJV "for a penny"), and six pounds of barley for a day's wages,..."

This part of the verse points to several things:

- High inflation - A day's wages will be required to buy enough food for one person. The wheat represents healthy food. It will be expensive but more nutritious.
- Rationing - A day's wages will be required to buy enough barley for a small family. Barley represents less nutritious food - in this case the type used to feed livestock. But this is all a day's wages will buy for a family.
- The scales could also represent rationing. As food grows scarcer it will undoubtedly be measured and rationed.

6.c. - "...and do not damage the oil and wine!"

There are a couple of commonly held views about what this means:

- Oil for making bread and wine for cooking or purifying water were considered staples of a first century diet and could represent common types of essential foods in the future. These type of items may be protected to ensure the supply will last as long as possible.
- Or... Oil and wine, as compared to wheat and barley, may represent luxuries that will be protected for those faithful to the antichrist.

True famine is something most of us have seen in photos but never experienced ourselves. Given that, I don't want us to underestimate the impact the Revelation famine will have on the earth. Over the centuries hundreds of millions of people have died in famines. Estimates are as high as 130 million in just the last 150 years. In our own lifetime famine has run rampant through India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Somalia, Ethiopia and the Sudan, just to name a few. Even today, when there is more food on earth than there has ever been, about 20 million people in Africa are on the verge of starvation; and worldwide the estimate is as high as 80 million people are at the crisis level. There is even an historical example very close to home. In the winter of 1609-10 there was a famine in Virginia that killed two-thirds of the colony at Jamestown. It's documented that survivors resorted to eating cats, dogs, rats, the soles of their shoes, and possibly each other. By the spring of 1610 only 60 colonists remained.

Hopefully this gives us some insight into the impact famine has had over time and the recognition of how much greater the Revelation famine will be. Rather than being limited to specific countries or regions the famine brought by the black horse will be worldwide and unprecedented -- truly apocalyptic. These are the famines listed by Jesus in Matthew 24:7.

LESSON 39

Chapter 6, Lesson 5

Quick Recap:

- Lesson 1 - Overview of chapter 6
- Lesson 2 - Verses 1-2 - The first Seal is opened - A white horse and rider brings peace -- but his peace will prove to be a lie.
- Lesson 3 - Verses 3-4 - The second Seal is opened - A red horse and rider is given power to bring global war.
- Lesson 4 - Verses 5-6 - The third Seal is broken - As a result of war the black horse and rider brings global famine.
- Lesson 5 - Verses 7-8 - The fourth Seal is opened. The most dreaded rider of all.

Chapter 6, verses 7-8

7. "When the Lamb opened the fourth Seal, I heard the voice of the fourth Living Creature say, "Come!". 8. I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named death, and hades was following close behind. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth."

7. "When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth Living Creature say, "Come!"."

As Jesus opens this Seal the fourth Living Creature announces the arrival of the last horseman - the most dreaded horseman of all. The horseman who shows the results of the previous three's evil work.

8a. - "I looked, and there before me was a pale horse!"

The Greek word used for the color of this horse is "chlomos". The root from which we get English words like chloroform and chlorine. Based on that I tend to think of this horse as a sickly whiteish-green color -- the pallor of death. Arguably, the image of the first three horses - white, red and black - could possibly be viewed as powerful and stately. But the pale green horse does not give the same impression. It gives us a view of weakness and sickness. A bad smell. An image of the dead. It is repulsive.

8b. - "Its rider was named death..."

The other riders had no names. They were simply known as "...its rider...". But this rider is different. He has a name. A name we all dread. He is the outcome of the war and famine that came before him plus the new power he brings. His name is descriptive and leaves no doubt who he is or what he does. The last two horses brought war and famine but it's not clear what the outcome of their destruction was. How great was the war? How far-reaching was the famine? How many people died? Typically, we tend to view most things from the perspective of how they can be quantified, but at the end of verse six we're left with no answer. Now the answer comes with the fourth rider, and there is no doubt what he brings. He brings death. He is "...the king of terrors". (Job 18:14). A power who temporary brings fear and destruction upon the earth. Rest

assured, as fearful as this is, this is a power that will one day be swallowed-up in the victory of Christ and destroyed forever (Isaiah 25:8 / I Corinthians 15:54 / Revelation 20:14).

8c. - "...and hades was following close behind."

The word hades in Greek basically means "the place of the dead". In the early Latin translations of the Bible it was used in place of the Hebrew word sheol (Luke 16:23 / Matt 16:18). In the Bible hades is typically used to describe the initial after-life condition of the dead -- in punishment -- prior to the final White Throne Judgment. This is the place from which the unbelieving dead will be at the second resurrection because, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years [the Millennium] had ended." (Revelation 20:5). It is then when "...and death and hades gave up the dead that were in them..." "...Then death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:13-14). But we can take comfort in the fact that from the very beginning of His revelation to John Jesus was very clear that "...I hold the keys to death and hades." (Revelation 1:18). They are under His control.

The way the word hades is used here gives us an image that someone is following closely behind death to scoop up his victims as they fall. The dead are the loss of humanity. The post-Rapture non-believers who find themselves following a false messiah, the antichrist, and now they are caught up in the apocalyptic chaos of war and famine as they are killed by the millions and held in torment waiting until the final judgment of Christ.

8d. - " They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth."

As with the other horsemen God allows death to have power to use as part of the Tribulation judgment. Here he not only gathers those killed by the horsemen of war and famine, but he brings powerful forces of his own - plague (diseases) and wild beasts. God has declared punishment like this before during times when His people were disobedient, idolatrous and apostate. "I the Lord have spoken. When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows and famine, I will shoot to destroy you. I will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food. I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I the Lord have spoken." (Ezekiel 5:15-17). This was decreed hundreds of years before the similar end-times events were revealed to John, but their scope and outcome is prophetic of what will occur during the Tribulation.

Some believe the reference to wild beasts could refer to the sinful and wicked mind of man during this period. Another thought, and probably more likely, is the wild beasts are actual animals that indicate how evil all creation will become. Even to the point of animals and maybe even birds and insects, taking part in the destruction of man.

So just how many people will be killed during all of this? We really don't know because we don't know what the population of the world will be when this finally occurs. But if we based it on today's global demographic, a fourth (25%) of the world's population would be 1.9 billion people. That's mind-boggling, particularly when you take into account the fairly short time frame in which this is all happening. By this point we are well into the Tribulation period with several years of worldwide war, famine, disease and attacks by wild animals. And beyond this, think about the psychological and emotional condition of the people on earth. It's something we can't fully

understand at this point. Worldwide war, famine, disease and death are rampant. People are literally dying by the billions as the world and its people become wicked beyond belief. Yet at the same time the antichrist will be growing in power. He will be capitalizing on the destruction and fear created by this environment, which will enable him to create a central government and a unified religion, as he deceptively sets himself up to declare himself to be god. It will be his actions during these events that will make people, even Israel, believe he is the Messiah.

Recap:

This concludes our study of the first four scroll Seals and the last of what is commonly called the "Four Horses of the Apocalypse". Remember, these are not only the initial judgments released by Jesus as He breaks the first four Seals, but they also create the environment necessary for the rise of the antichrist. Chapter 6 provides a summary of events that will occur during most of the Tribulation, and shows us the breaking of all but the last and seventh Seal. It also follows very closely the chronology of the Olivet Discourse provided by Jesus in Matthew 24 (Mark 13, Luke 21). These four events begin the seven year period of time from the moment Jesus opens the first scroll Seal until He returns to destroy satan and all creation (Revelation 19-20). This is the first 3 1/2 years - often called "The Time of Sorrows" - when judgmental forces - false-peace, war, famine and death, begin to bring destruction on the earth and its inhabitants, but more importantly, the chaos created by these forces is what enables the antichrist to rise to power. As we will see, the fourth Seal and rider brings us close to the mid-point and the final 3 1/2 years called the "Great Tribulation". But it is these first 3 1/2 years, begun by release of the four horsemen powers, when God allows the activities of man - primarily the antichrist - to lure unrepentant man to become followers of satan.

As the first four Seals are broken and forces of destruction are released the antichrist will grow in power. He will use this environment and the resulting fear, oppression, depression and sin to take over governments, consolidate nations, lead vicious armies, control commerce, dictate economics and form a unified religion based on himself. And as he does, we will see more and more examples of how satan uses the antichrist and the coming false-prophet to create an evil trinity as he tries in vain to be like God.

Although the first represents the antichrist, the four horsemen of chapter 6 are not four people. They are essentially the forces and powers released by Jesus that create the environment necessary to begin the judgment of man. The opening of the first Seal begins the seven year Tribulation period. The last unaccounted-for "week" of Daniel is now identified. Although there are not four literal horsemen these events do bring about the existence of one man - the antichrist. He initially comes on the scene bearing peace. He will be the ultimate diplomat, a talented and charismatic leader and a healer of the economy. A world leader like we have never seen. He will foster peace across nations - even the Middle East. He will create economic stability, he will usher in a unified religion and he will even help Israel rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstate the sacrificial system. --- But it will all be a lie and he will use the powers of war, famine and death to bring total wickedness upon man and to build an empire and army to fight Jesus.

As we continue through the rest of chapter 6 remember that the environment created by these events will continue until the end of the Tribulation when Jesus returns to destroy satan and the antichrist (chapter 19).

LESSON 40

Chapter 6, Lesson 6

Quick Recap and Setting the Stage:

In the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 (Mark 13 and Luke 21) Jesus provides a prophetic summary of what we are seeing in chapter 6. Let's quickly review how He explained the events that lead up to the fifth Seal:

- "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah...' (Matthew 24:4-5).

Revelation parallel - the first rider on a white horse brings peace -- false peace. He will later claim to be a messiah.

1. "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars..." (Matthew 24:6)
 - Revelation parallel - the second rider on a red horse brings war.
2. "There will be famines..." (Matthew 24:7)
 - Revelation parallel - the third rider on a black horse brings famine.
3. "All of these are the beginning of birth pangs..." [Beginning of Sorrows KJV] (Matthew 24:8)
 - Revelation parallel. The fourth rider on a sickly pale green horse brings the death associated with the actions of the first three.

All of this begins during the first 3 1/2 year portion of the Tribulation - the "Beginning of Sorrows" that create the initial "birth pangs" that will now begin to grow more frequent and stronger.

4, "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." (Matthew 24:9).

- Revelation parallel - This is what we'll begin to see as the fifth Seal is opened.

After the Rapture and removal of the church from earth, Jesus will take the scroll from the Father's hand and begin to break the Seals. This will release four forces of judgment - false-peace, war, famine and death. Not only will this begin the first half of God's Tribulational judgment --- the seven year period known as the seventeenth week of Daniel --- but it also establishes an environment in-which the antichrist will begin building his base of satanic power. He will do this by using the fear, depression and wickedness that will result from the war, famine, disease and death of the first four Seals. It is through this chaos that people will be drawn to the antichrist as he begins to portray himself as their messiah -- the one who will bring peace to this mess. This peace will include a treaty with Israel in which he pretends to protect them; even allowing them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstate the sacrificial system.

Through this chaos the antichrist will grow stronger and stronger, and as he does God will unleash even more destructive judgments -- each one much faster and more powerful than the last. The early Seals we've studied so far are the "birth pangs" spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 24:8) that will grow in intensity as each successive one is opened. The later Seals (6 and 7) will reveal even more cataclysmic judgments which come more frequently and with much more destructive power. The sixth Seal releases cosmic disturbances we can hardly imagine. These will send the world into total turmoil. Then as the seventh and final Seal is broken it releases seven "Trumpet" judgments,

and when the seventh Trumpet is blasted it will release seven "Bowl" judgments. These are the final and most destruction judgments of all as God pours His wrath upon the earth.

This lesson we are now at the mid-point of the seven years - the fifth Seal - the period of the Tribulation described in Daniel and Revelation as "the times, times and half a time", 1260 days or 42 months which are all 3 1/2 years. Recall, the Tribulation is a seven year period. The last of seventy periods, of seven weeks each, that when combined are known as "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel". The seven year phase, the Tribulation is broken into two segments - the first period called the "Beginning of Sorrows" (KJV) or the "Beginning of birth pangs", is followed by the second half called the "Great Tribulation". At the end of the first half is when the antichrist creates the "Abomination that Causes Desolation". The moment when he desecrates the third Jewish temple by declaring himself to be God. - "He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven. In the middle of the seven [3 1/2] he will put an end to the sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." (Daniel 9:27). When this happens those remaining in Israel will flee into the mountains (Revelation 12:6 / Mark 13:14-19 / Matthew 24:15-21 / Luke 21:21). This is now the time of "Jacob's Troubles" when Israel will have to be protected by God or else destroyed (Jeremiah 30:7).

And that's where we are now in the Revelation timeline. The first half is drawing to a close and the second half - the "Great" Tribulation will soon start. The antichrist is nearing the peak of his satanic power as he seeks to rule the world. His empire will be called "Babylon the Great - The Mother of all Prostitutes" (Revelation 12 / 13:2 / 17:5). A reference to man's increase in sin across the centuries, until the point his empire rings synonymous with the ancient sinful enemies of God. He will probably come on the scene as a popular political leader, a financial genius, a commander of armies, and then, through the message of the false-prophet he will establish a false religion by the - "...use of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie." (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Then those who accept this religion will take the "...mark of the beast..." as a defacto worshiper of satan (Revelation 13:16-18). But those that do not will become the target of his blood lust.

Yet, through all of this turmoil Jesus will provide a source for the gospel to be shared. First by 144,000 converted Jews (chapter 7 & 14), then by two heavenly witnesses (chapter 11) and finally by a proclaiming angel (14:6). To me, this is what Jesus was talking about when He said "And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14). In the chronology of the Olivet Discourse He said those words just before describing the Abomination that causes Desolation and the escape of Israel (Matthew 24:15-20). This is why I believe there will be people saved during the Tribulation through the ministry of the three evangelical groups described above, and through their ministry to others. This will result in a portion of the post-rapture population coming to Christ. Those described by John at the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the millennium, "And I saw those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God, they had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received the mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 20:4). These will be the Tribulation Saints who will come under great persecution. That is the part of the story as the fifth seal is opened and things are about to get crazy.

Chapter 6, verses 9-11

9. "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' 11. Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."

9.a. - "When He opened the fifth seal..."

We have reached the point where the antichrist is in full power. He has used the horseman-forces of war, famine and death to bring chaos to the world. Scripture indicates he will rise as a powerful financial, political and religious leader who will capitalize on the fear of the day to present himself as a messiah figure. Up to this point he has protected Israel but as his power grows he will enter the newly-built temple and declare himself to be God. Israel will now become the enemy of the world and the antichrist will then turn his satanic focus on destroying Israel and all followers of the true Messiah.

9.b. - "...I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain..."

The term "slain" is to me a word that means extreme and violent death. It is more than just "killed" or "executed". It speaks of intentional pursuit and bloody and violent murder. It reminds us of the description of Jesus in chapter 5 who is recognized as "...a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain..." (Revelation 5:6). As believers we can quickly form a picture in our mind of our Savior who had been inhumanly tortured and nailed to a cross. This is the image we need to see in the souls of saints under the altar. In Exodus 29:12 we're given insight into the inner-workings of the sacrificial system. - "Take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar." (see also Leviticus 4:7). This is a picture of the souls we now see who will be sacrificed during the Tribulation because of their faith. Jesus gives us even more insight into how this persecution will take place when He says, "They will deliver you up to synagogues and prisons and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my Name." (Luke 21:12). These are not the random killing by mobs of war-ravaged sinners. This will be officially sanctioned and government supported genocide of all believers. This will include the courts ["...brought before kings and governors..."], which will be known to and agreed to by the church ["...synagogues..."]. The church of the antichrist. These are the saints who will be slain during the Tribulation because they would not worship the beast or take his mark (Revelation 20:4). But why?

9.c. - "...because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."

Now John's view temporarily shifts back to heaven as he sees those who have been martyred for Christ. Recall in chapter 1 John was imprisoned on Patmos "...because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 1:9). Now, the martyred souls in heaven have been slain for the same reason, "...because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained". But if all of the believers ("saints") were removed during the Rapture, then who are these people who are being slain now? I believe they are those saved during the Tribulation by the evangelical proclamation of the gospel by the 144,000 Jews, the two witnesses and the proclaiming angel. Jesus tells us this in the Olivet Discourse when He promises - "And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14). It is

these souls who have accepted the true Christ, not the antichrist, and have been covered by the blood rather than labeled by the mark (Revelation 7:9&13-15 / Matthew 24:9-14). And they accepted Christ at a time when being a believer will most certainly result in your death. In fact, Jesus says "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect [saved] those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:22).

10.a. - "They called out in a loud voice...",

The first four Seals brought the powers of evil, but the fifth brings the power of prayer. We saw another view of prayer's power when "...the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four-Elders fell down before the Lamb, holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." (Revelation 5:8). But here, in chapter 6 these prayers are not carried to heaven. They are presented personally in heaven by those who have been slain for their faith. Their prayers are powerful and they call out "...in a loud voice...". These are not prayers of the heart silently whispered in the quiet of the night. They are fervent prayers spoken to God from within His presence. "Lord, I call to You; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call You. May my prayers be set before You like incense..." (Psalms 141:1-2).

10.b. - "...How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true..."

"How long...". They grow impatient for vengeance while at the same time recognizing the total sovereign power of God, his holiness and the truth of His promises.

10.c. - "...until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

There are a lot of different thoughts about this verse. Some view their impatience for vengeance and their call for God's judgment as a sign that the age of grace has passed. And with its passing those who were killed seek God's vengeance on their murderers. But their attitude should not surprise us. God is a God of love, so much so that He sent Himself - in the person of the Son - to die for us. But as we see all through the book of Revelation God is a God of judgment and severe punishment. He is also a God of vengeance. He reminds us that "...Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." (Romans 12:19). "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them" (Deuteronomy 32:35). His role of Judge and His actions of vengeance are why the saints in heaven are praying for His intervention. Their prayer is very similar to the request of the Psalmist at a time when Israel sought God's vengeance on their persecutors. - "O Lord, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, O Judge of the earth; payback the proud what they deserve. How long will the wicked, O Lord; how long will the wicked be jubilant." (Psalms 94:1-2).

11.a. - "Then each of them was given a white robe..."

Throughout the book of Revelation a white robe is used to symbolize the faithful followers of Jesus. Recall His promise to the church of Sardis. If they would "...Wake up!..." -- "...and repent...", "They will walk with Me, dressed in white for they are worthy." (Revelation 3:2-4). In chapter 5 we met the Twenty-Four-Elders, who I believe represent the raptured church who "...were dressed in white..." (Revelation 5:4). Likewise, in chapter 7 we will see the great multitude of believers in heaven "...wearing white robes..." (Revelation 7:9). But probably most revealing is the view of Jesus as He returns to avenge the souls of all believers and to destroy sin and the source of all sin. "He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and His name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven are following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." (Revelation

19:11-14). This portion of verse 11 assures us that those praying under the altar are the children of God, made white and clean through the blood of Christ.

11.b. - "...and they were told to wait a little longer..."

When I read this portion of verse 11 I think of Psalms 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God." How often we want God to jump to our demands and do His bidding on our time table. But when we do we are borderline doubting that God is in control. Even here, the worthy saints in white are told to be patient, that God has a plan and His timetable is perfect.

11.c. - "...until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."

This is such a troubling verse. God knows all things, and as a result He knows how every situation will end. That's very difficult for us to understand. Particularly when the outcome is something we would prefer not happen. In this verse we are told God is waiting for others to be slain before He will send His final judgments. But if we look at it another way it has a much more positive message. God knows that in this time of Tribulation, when satan and the antichrist are at the peak of evil that nearly every person who does not take the mark of the beast will most likely be killed. So another way of looking at this verse would be that God will wait until the last person is saved and then His total vengeance will come.

The four initial forces released by Jesus have brought punishment throughout the world. It is during this time of insane sin when the antichrist and the false-prophet will emerge to set themselves up with satan as a trinity of evil. But as they implement their satanic plans God continues to offer grace to the world. Many will come to accept Jesus and refuse the mark, but most will not. It is when the antichrist enters the temple in Jerusalem and declares himself to be God that things begin to quickly change. The final Seals, 6 and 7, will unleash horrendous judgments. Far more rapid and destructive than anything seen to date. And as these Seals are opened satan brings armies against God in one last effort to gain control. Control he never could and never will have. The enmity between his seed and God's is ready to come to an end. This is what we will now see starting with the sixth seal and running through chapter 18.

LESSON 41

Chapter 6, Lesson 7

Introduction to the Sixth Seal

Note:

Due to the complexity of these verses we'll discuss this lesson into two parts. The first will set the stage by helping us understand a dramatic shift in the Revelation timeline brought about by the sixth Seal. The second will focus on the verses themselves, 6:12-17.

The Sixth Seal - Setting the Stage:

We are now in the second half of Daniel's "seventieth week"; the second 3 1/2 years of the seven year Tribulation. This is the period commonly referred to as the "Great" Tribulation; a time that ushers-in a prophetically important end-times event known as "The Day of the Lord." Things are now moving at a fever pitch. The antichrist has desecrated the temple in Jerusalem and made an affront to God by declaring himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Daniel 9:27). He is the most powerful human leader in history; controlling global finance, politics and military power in an empire like we have never seen before. An empire so evil it is called "The Mother of all Prostitutes." (Revelation 17:5). Through his satanic power combined with influence of the "false-prophet", (Revelation 13:11) he will create a false religion and coerce most of humanity into taking his "mark" on their hand or forehead; publicly signifying they are his followers (Revelation 13:18). For those who refuse to accept him as their messiah there is almost certain death, but even if they survive, the lack of his mark means they cannot buy or sell. In other words they must survive without the ability to buy what they need or to earn a living (Revelation 13:17). They will be outcasts in every way and hated by everyone. As Jesus explained, "...you will be hated by all nations because of me." (Matthew 24:10). But throughout this period of great turmoil the "...gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14). This will be accomplished by 144,000 converted Jews, the Two Witnesses and the proclaiming angel (chapters 7, 11 & 14). Their witness will be effective because God has already promised "...so is my word that goes out from my mouth; it will not return to me empty..." (Isaiah 55:11). Because of their testimony people will come to the Lord during this terrible time. A time when persecution of Jews and newly-saved believers will not only be rampant, it will be government sanctioned and supported by the courts and the church (Matthew 24:9 / Luke 21:12).

Now with opening of the 6th Seal we begin to see a picture of what will happen throughout the second 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation. This begins "The Day of the Lord". The time when God's final and horrific wrath will be blasted and poured out on earth as Jesus releases unbelievably catastrophic and cataclysmic judgments upon all creation. To keep this in perspective, remember that the sixth Seal is part of a series of twenty-one Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments that will all be released within the seven year period. The other events we will see in chapters 7 through 18 occur while these are being released. We'll see that more clearly as we move forward.

The Day of the Lord

The sixth Seal begins to reveal an event described throughout the Bible as "The Day of the Lord". This a series of judgments like nothing we have ever seen before - in fact, they are so destructive we can barely picture in our minds what the world will be like during that time. The term Day of the Lord is used nineteen times in both the Old and New Testaments. In some cases, it describes historic events of the past when God severely punished His people (Isaiah 13:6-22 / Ezekiel 30:2-19 / Joel 1:15 / Amos 5:18-20), but in most cases the term points to an end-times event we will see revealed by the Sixth and seventh Seals. A time of, "Great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again." (Matthew 24:21). It is also called the Day of Doom, the Day of Vengeance, the Day of Wrath, the Day of Visitation, the Great Day of Their Wrath, the Day Holy to the Lord, the Day of Judgment and Destruction, the Great and Dreadful Day, or the Great Day of God Almighty", but whichever label it is given the outcome is the same. It is a series of judgments beginning with the opening of the sixth Seal when God unleashes destructive forces we can hardly imagine.

To put us in the right frame of mind about the Day of the Lord, let's look at several passages of scripture that provide a prophetic view of God's final wrath. As we do, pay attention how these align with the events we will see in verses 12-17 of chapter 6:

- Joel 2:31 - "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Quoted by Peter in Acts 2:20).
- Joel 3:14-16 - "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and sky will tremble."
- Isaiah 2:6-22 (19 quoted) "Men will flee to caves in the rocks and holes in the ground from the dread of the Lord and the splendor of His majesty when He rises to shake the earth."
- Obadiah 15: "The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you..."
- Zechariah 14: portions of verses 1-6 - "A day of the Lord is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west..." - "...On that day there will be no light..."
- Malachi 4:1 - "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:2 - "...for you know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety.", destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."
- 2 Peter 3:7-10 - "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends; with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

Wherever there are multiple opinions of interpretation, I try to explain each one and then explain where my heart falls. That said, as I was studying the Day of the Lord I read a commentary that made a subtle link between Peter's comments in 2 Peter 3 (above) with the chronology surrounding God's steps of destruction. I had never thought about it this way before but I found it to be an interesting train of thought. So as I personally dig deeper to better understand it, thought I would share the potential link with you...

As we've discussed, chapter 6 begins to reveal the "Day of the Lord" and the final destruction of all creation. It will take the seventh Seal to release the 14 Trumpets and Bowls before the "final" destruction is complete. But...we know from Revelation 20 that satan will be released after the thousand year millennium and with the army of Gog and Magog will make war on Jesus one last time before satan will be defeated and the armies destroyed by fire (20:7-9). Then as Jesus sits for the final judgment "...Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them..." (20:11); "...for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." - In other words, the final destruction of satan and his followers comes after the thousand year millennial period. All that said, let's put this in context to see how the Revelation chronology might relate to the passage in 2 Peter 3.

- The Great Tribulation period (chapter 6:12-17 through chapter 18), is followed by the return of the Lord (chapter 19). This is followed by the one-thousand year "Millennium" when the victorious Christ reigns on earth, the temporary release of satan, the destruction of him and the armies of Gog and Magog and then the Great White Throne Judgment (chapter 20). After that God creates a sin-free new heaven and new earth (chapter 21-22).
- We tend to think of the total destruction of creation as the end of the seven year Tribulation; at Armageddon (Revelation 16:16), but in reality, God's total and final destruction doesn't come until after the one thousand year Millennium (Revelation 20:7-10). Jesus destroys sinful mankind but holds satan at bay for a thousand years while He reigns on earth. He then releases satan, who forms an army - Gog and Magog - (descended from Tribulation survivors! - now that's a head-hurter) and then Jesus finally destroys them all.

So...

- The "final" destruction of disobedient man doesn't come at the end of the seven year Tribulation, but comes a thousand years later at the end of the Millennium.
- Given that, the period of destruction known as the "Day" of the Lord actually lasts from the sixth Seal through the seven years, punctuated by the Millennial reign, and is then finalized at the end of the thousand years.
- Given that, is Peter making a link between the "Day of the Lord" at the end of the Great Tribulation with the post Millennial destruction of satan's followers by fire a thousand years later? Well, according to Peter, the end of the Day of the Lord will come "...with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.". That sounds like the end of the Tribulation, but we know from Revelation 20 that Jesus will reign on the earth after this for one thousand years. Revelation 20 also describes the destruction of satan's post Millennial army as similar to Peter's description, "...But fire came down from heaven and destroyed them..." (Revelation 20:9). This occurs at the end of the thousand year Millennium, not at the end of the seven year Tribulation. That "could" be why Peter highlights the fact that to God a "day" is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a "day".

- So...given that, could the thousand year "day" Peter speaks to be synonymous with the final end of the "Day" of the Lord"?

Now, let me be clear. I hesitated to include this because the Bible does not provide a clean connection between the battle at the end of the seven years Tribulation and the battle at the end of the Millennial reign. But it describes both; one at the end of the Tribulation and one at the end of the Millennium. I find it interesting that both battles occur on each end of the thousand year period and Peter reminds us in the same passage of scripture that a thousand years is like a "day" to God. I included this discussion so we can think about the linkage between the two periods and about the importance of digging and digging through scripture until we find the true meaning.

Hopefully all of this helps you get a feel for the Day of the Lord as seen through Old and New Testament prophecy. Now as we study the sixth and seventh Seals we will better understand the details as Jesus brings them to light.

The Sixth Seal in Context:

To put the sixth Seal in context of the Revelation timeline let's look back over the first five seals to remind ourselves that each one reveals some type of "force":

- 1st Seal - false-peace
- 2nd Seal - worldwide war
- 3rd Seal - worldwide famine
- 4th Seal - worldwide pestilence and death
- 5th Seal - prayers of the martyrs
- 6th Seal - and now we see the force of fear as Jesus releases one catastrophic destruction after another. This is a fear like man has never been felt before. This isn't just an extreme phobia, this is a show-stopping, heart-stopping fear that will cause man to pray for death. It is the fear Jesus talked about during the Olivet Discourse when He said "Men will faint from the terror..." (Luke 21:26). Men and women will be literally scared to death.

As Christians we tend to think of God as a God of love -- which of course He is. But for unbelievers a time will come when His patience has worn thin and He will be a God of harsh judgment -- a God to be reckoned with. The Bible is very clear about this - "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace. For we know Him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will judge his people". It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:29-31). --- "For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29).

Now, with that background we're prepared to study Chapter 6, verses 12-17.

This is what we're going to see.

12. "I watched as he opened the sixth Seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13. and the stars in the sky fell to the earth, as late figs drop from the fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face 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 can stand it?

LESSON 42

Chapter 6, Lesson 8

Note:

In lesson 7 we discussed the events leading up to the sixth Seal. That background was important because the sixth Seal takes us firmly into the second half of the Tribulation and begins a series of judgments known as "The Day of the Lord".

For added context, let's review a portion of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 and Luke 21 related to the sixth Seal. This will help us understand Jesus' brief discussion of these same events. I would also recommend you look back at the reference verses in the previous lesson related to "The Day of the Lord".

Matthew 24:29 - "Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

Luke 21:25-26 - "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint in terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

These verses describe a wide range of events over the last half of the Tribulation. From great cosmic disturbances until the time when man --- after his mistake of following the antichrist --- finds himself on the losing side of battling with God. The final outcome of these verses will end in chapters 18 and 19 when God pours out His last judgments and Jesus returns as the Warrior King.

Now, with that background and our previous discussion let's go to Chapter 6, verses 12-17 - the Sixth Seal

12. "I watched as he opened the sixth Seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13. and the stars in the sky fell to the earth, as late figs drop from the fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face 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 can stand it?

12.a. - "I watched as He opened the sixth seal..."

The first five Seals were opened by Jesus but their outcome included the actions of man to --- bring false-peace, make war, pray for vengeance and abominate the temple. But starting with the sixth Seal man plays little or no role. As the sixth and seventh Seals are broken by Jesus, they release a series of increasingly destructive judgments that are blasted and poured over creation one after another over a very short period of time. These last two Seals are totally unlike the first five. Whereas the first four will release forces and powers that not only begin God's judgment but also

enable the rise of the antichrist, and the fifth Seal brings the martyrs prayer for vengeance, the sixth and seventh seals bring cataclysmic destructions we cannot even imagine that will literally tear the universe apart.

12.b. - "There was a great earthquake."

According to the US Geological Survey, there have been over 10,000 major earthquakes since 1900 measuring 6.0 or greater on the Richter Scale. In their view "We have experienced a period that has one of the highest rates of great earthquakes ever recorded." This included twice as many large earthquakes of 7.0 or greater in 2014 alone than at any time since 1979, and 13 6.5 or greater quakes in April 2019." Based on this its obvious earthquakes are a fairly frequent natural phenomenon created by the movement of fractured tectonic plates that make up the earth's surface. But, all "...natural phenomenon..." is still under the authoritative control of God; even the slightest movement of the earth's crust. But the earthquakes in Revelation will be more than just tremors of the earth. They will undoubtedly initiate a chain reaction of other events like volcanic eruptions and even massive tsunami tidal-waves. We saw a taste of this in 2011 when a massive tidal wave 133 feet tall and traveling at 435 MPH hit the east coast of Japan killing over 16,000 people. Even more mind-boggling is the fact this massive wave was the result of a 9.0 level "Megathrust" earthquake that originated 43 miles off the coast and 18 miles deep. Given that, can you imagine what the destruction of the "great" earthquake of the sixth Seal will bring. Not only catastrophic destruction of the earth but it will bring chaos and fear around the world. As Luke described it -- the "...nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea." (Luke 21:26).

Even though earthquakes are natural disasters, nothing in nature moves without the knowledge and consent of God. We see this in several examples recorded in the Bible. Times when God did or will use earthquakes to literally shake creation at His command. Here are a few examples. You'll note a couple of these are prophecy related directly to the events of the sixth Seal:

- "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him" (Exodus 19:17-18).
- "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up His Spirit." At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open." (Matthew 27:50-51)
- "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it." (Matthew 28:2).
- "The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; He sits enthroned between the cherubim. Let the earth shake." (Psalms 99:1)
- "At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' (Hebrews 12:26).
- "Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day, in the day of His burning anger." (Isaiah 13:13)
- "In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the sovereign Lord." (Ezekiel 38:19).

The "great" earthquake of the sixth Seal will be like no other. It is part of the "...zeal and fiery wrath..." that God, releases on "...the day, in the day of His burning anger..."; the Day of the Lord. Based on the destruction described later in these verses the earthquake will literally shake the entire universe and result in unbelievable cosmic disturbances we cannot even imagine. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 24:29 when He said, "Immediately after the distress of those days 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'" It's not just the earth that will be shaken by the hand of God but the "heavenly bodies" --- the universe --- God will literally shake space.

12.c. - "The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red...". The imagery here is pretty straightforward to me. Sackcloth was a course heavy material made of flax or hemp. It was thick and uncomfortable to wear and was a term used in the Bible to represent submission (1 Kings 20:31-32) or grief and self-humiliation (2 Kings 19:1-2). For it to be made of goat hair further emphasizes a thick, course and uncomfortable covering. So without reading too much into the imagery of this verse these words form in my mind a sense of despair, a heaviness and depression, a rough and uncomfortable day, smothering, hot and black with fear that takes away all of the light from the world. The sun, the reflective moon and the other heavenly bodies are blotted out leaving a lost world in utter darkness -- a place of extreme fear.

Some commentators believe the heavenly bodies being shaken by the universe-quake will result in great volcanic eruptions around the world. This would in-turn fill the sky with thick clouds of dust and debris that will block out the sun and turn the moon red. That may be exactly what happens, but in my heart I see these events as the direct hand of God. We see this many times in the Bible:

- At creation, when the words of God created all things (Genesis chapter 1-2).
- When God's command parted the Red Sea so His chosen people could flee Egypt (Exodus 14:14 and 21).
- When God made the sun stand still so the armies of Israel under Joshua might be victorious (Joshua 10:12-14).
- And when Jesus was on the cross the sun went black and "...darkness came over the whole land..." (Mark 15:33).

Certainly God could use a natural disaster to do this, but I believe it's more direct than that. As we'll see in verses 15-17 the people of earth realize this is not a power of nature, but it is the power of "...Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Revelation 6:15-17). I believe the Tribulation sinners will know it is the hand of the Lord who is striking them down. The same thing the disciples realized when they said "...Even the wind and the waves obey Him!" (Matthew 8:27) - The same thing the Psalmist recognized when he recorded, "For He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves." (Psalms 107:25) - The same thing God said through the prophet, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land." (Haggai 2:6).

13.a. - "...and the stars in the sky fell to the earth, as late figs drop from the fig tree when shaken by a strong wind."

The Greek word for "stars" is "aster" from which we get our word "asteroid". As it is used here the term could refer to any heavenly body or object and not just what we would consider to be a "star". For years astronomers have tracked asteroids in our solar system that could potentially impact the earth. It is a rare but very real threat. For example, on June 30th, 1908, it is believed an asteroid hit the earth near the Tunguska River in Siberian Russia. The explosion flattened over 80 million trees over 830 square miles even though it is believed the object itself disintegrated about 6 miles from earth. Meaning that the devastation was the result of just it's energy, not the rock itself. Even more amazing is the fact scientists believe the asteroid was only 620 feet wide. Fairly small in astronomic terms but large enough that the shock wave measured 5.0 on the Richter Scale and the blast equaled a 30 megaton nuclear weapon. A little more recent, on May 3rd, 2019, an asteroid the size of a school bus (JA 2020) flew by within 148,000 miles from earth. That's about half the distance from the earth to the moon. Currently scientists are tracking thousands of asteroids in our solar system. Those within 5 million miles are characterized as "Near Earth Objects". The largest of these, the Apollo Asteroid JM-8, is believed to be about 10 miles wide and the smallest about 26 feet across. But even one that small could have a devastating impact if it were to strike the earth. Particularly if dozens of them hit the earth at about the same time. Like figs falling from a tree.

14.a. - "The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place."..."

The mountains and islands moving give further indication of the level of destruction resulting from the great earthquakes. But the "...sky receding like a scroll..." is something altogether different. Isaiah prophesied this hundreds of years before Christ was born -- "All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withering leaves from a vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree." (Isaiah 34:4). We don't know exactly what it means to say the "...sky receded like a scroll rolled up...", but if you picture a scroll being tightly rolled-up under pressure it gives you an idea. As the heavens are shaken and the planets, stars and other heavenly bodies are moved from their places, the sky will literally roll-up and disappear.

Peter adds a little more detail in his description --"But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." (2 Peter 3:10). As Peter and Isaiah describe, the entire universe will now be subject to the total destructive power of "The Day of the Lord". But with all of this destruction, war, famine, plagues and devastation occurring how could The Day of the Lord "...come like a thief..."? I believe it's because the unredeemed at that future time will be the most sinful people of all time, living under the most sinful leader of all time and practicing the most sinful worship of all time. In His Olivet Discourse Jesus reminds us "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark..." (Matthew 24:37-39). We also know that at the time the Two Witnesses are murdered - at the heights of destruction - people "...will celebrate by sending each other gifts..." (Revelation 11:10). In other words, people will be so focused on their sinful pursuits they will still function under the stress and strain of the Tribulation. I believe this indicates the power of the antichrist over their minds. That although the world will be suffering greatly he will still be able to convince those he has "marked" that he is their savior and messiah; as he "...deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a

powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness." (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

15.a. - "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man..."

Everyone on earth will be affected. From the most powerful to the least, none of sinful mankind will escape. As we will see in the next chapter, some accept Jesus during this time, but billions will not and will all be subject to God's wrath.

15.b. - "...hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains."

But people will begin to understand that events are growing even more destructive than before. Fear will permeate every facet of their lives and they will seek an escape. Even if it means hiding underground or in any solid shelter they can find. "Go into the rocks, hide in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of His majesty!" - "Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of His majesty, when He rises to shake the earth." (Isaiah 2:10 and 19). Earlier in Revelation John gave us a quick insight of the day when those remaining would recognize what was happening - "Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him." (Revelation 1:7). Jesus too indicated this day, "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn." (Matthew 24:30).

16.a. - "They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

Amazing. At this point they will understand the wrath they suffer comes from God the Father "...who sits on the throne..." and from the "Lamb". This illustrates that even though they continue to reject God the effective and widespread preaching of the gospel by the 144,000, the Two Witnesses and the proclaiming angel has been heard. Otherwise, how else would post-rapture man know who the Lamb is? Or know it is the Father who sits on the throne? But...in their great delusion (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12) it is too late and the people do not call out to God. Instead, they call out to the earth; to the rocks and the mountains. As if these natural elements could or would respond to their prayers. They are so separated from God and the truth of the Lamb that as we'll see later, "Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pain and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done." (Revelation 16:10-11). -- Man has come to the point of total earthly destruction and even though they recognize the source of their suffering is God they still refuse to accept His gift of grace and salvation.

17.a. - For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand it? --- Who can stand it? We'll begin to discuss that in our next lesson.

LESSON 43

Revelation, chapter 7, verses 1-8

In the last verse of chapter 6 John asks a very profound question --- "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand it?"

"...who can stand it?"

What an amazing question. Normally we would think no one could survive such an extended period of war, famine, plagues, persecution and death, yet as we will see, there will be many who do --- but only those who come to a saving grace in Christ during the Tribulation. Looking back to chapter 6 we saw a series of events that brought judgment on creation. As the antichrist grows in power, God's wrath will become more and more destructive. This is seen during the first 3 1/2 years through the opening of four Seals. The first ushers in false-peace through the antichrist, then the next three escalate through war, famine, pestilence and death to bring chaos to the whole world. But during this time many will turn to Jesus even though when they do, most will probably be martyred. We see this in the fifth Seal, when those who were killed for their testimony of Jesus bow before the throne of God and loudly call for His vengeance. Once this happens God's mighty hand brings cataclysmic destructions that are hard for us to even imagine. And if that were not enough, all of this will be followed by a seventh Seal that brings 14 additional events of mass destruction culminating in a war in which Jesus destroys the sinful inhabitants of the earth. But even after all of this, a few will survive.

Before we talk about who will survive let's talk about who won't. Simply, everyone who does not accept Christ as their Savior. At the very beginning of the Tribulation there will be no believers left on earth because we will have recently been gathered to Christ through the Rapture. Paul speaks of those who remain when he says, "...destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:3). Throughout this period of time sin grows unabated and wickedness flourishes like never before. Once the antichrist rises in power and sets himself up as god, most people will worship him and take his "mark". This is because "...they refused to love the truth and so be saved." (2 Thessalonians 2:10), and as a result, "...the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall." (Malachi 4:1-3).

So who are these people who will survive and how will they come to know the Lord if no one is left to witness to them? Because Jesus will make a way so that, "...this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14). Or another way of putting it, "...before the end comes the gospel will be preached around the world." We know the timing of this because "the end" is the end of the Tribulation. Even though all of the Raptured believers will be gone during the Tribulation the Holy Spirit and the word of God will still be active.

Like never before the gospel will be spread and man will come to repentance because, "...my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11). This promise is emphasized by Peter when he reminds us that during The Day of the Lord it will still be God's desire for no one "...to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). From this we know the gospel will be spread throughout this terrible time of destruction. We also know that God, as He has done in the past, will gather His remnant of the faithful no matter how bad the situation may be.

For example:

- When God destroyed the earth by flood Noah and his family were spared because "...he walked with God..." at a time when "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on earth had become..." (Genesis 6:5-9),
- God destroyed the wicked region of Sodom and Gomorrah because, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous...". But when He did, He saved Lot and a portion of his family because he had been faithful in spite of the sin surrounding him (Genesis 19),
- When God destroyed Jericho through Joshua and the army of Israel He spared the prostitute Rahab and her family because she recognized that "...the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." (Joshua 2:11),
- When God allowed Judah to be conquered by Babylon and taken into exile there was a remnant who "...survived the exile..." and remained in Israel. Although they were "...in great trouble and disgrace...", they were still there when Nehemiah returned to rebuild their kingdom. (Nehemiah 1:2-3)

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus indicates that some will come to Him and survive the Tribulation because - "...he who stands firm to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:12-13). This doesn't mean they will be "saved" (in a salvation sense) just because they physically made it through the Tribulation. It means some will survive the Tribulation because they turned to Jesus and believed in the gospel during this terrible time. Yet as we saw in the fifth Seal not everyone saved during the Tribulation will survive to the end. Undoubtedly, many will be martyred and others will be killed by the wars, famine, plagues and cataclysmic disasters, but there will be a remnant who will walk into the Millennial Kingdom having survived the Tribulation. This group will include both Jews and Gentiles who accept Christ, but even though Gentiles will be included we must keep in mind that the key focus of God's redeeming power during the Tribulation will be Israel. Although by this point they will have been disobedient to God for hundreds of generations they are still God's chosen people and will be given another opportunity to accept Christ as the Messiah. During the Tribulation a portion of Israel will finally do just that. These survivors -- converted Jews -- will come to understand what is happening, "...and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Revelation 11:13). "For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household goods. Afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will be trembling to the Lord and to His blessings in the last days." (Hosea 3:4-5). Afterwards they will be protected by God for the final 3 1/2 years (Revelation 12:6), because, "On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord going before them. On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced,

and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son." (Zechariah 12:8-10). They will mourn because they finally recognize it was them, the nation of Israel, who sent their Messiah to the cross. This is the time a remnant of Israel will finally see who Jesus really is and accept Him as their King. This is when the remnant of Israel "...will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Axel." (Zechariah 14-5). Paul speaks of this time when he says, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved." (Romans 11:25-26). By saying "all Israel" Paul doesn't mean all Jews will be saved just because they are Jews. He is talking about the portion of Jews who come to Christ during the final period and will be protected. This is the time just before the gospel ceases and the final Gentiles are saved. The prophecy spoken of by Joel pulls it all together - "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. You sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls." (Joel 2:28-32).

But how will these people be saved if there are no believers left on earth after the Rapture to share the gospel? Revelation speaks of three primary evangelical sources. Who will proclaim the gospel during the Tribulation:

- The 144,000 converted Jews (Revelation chapters 7 and 14),
- The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11),
- The proclaiming angel (Revelation 14:6).

Yet I think it is likely there may be a couple more sources coming from those who remain after the Rapture. For example, let's say the Rapture occurred on Sunday morning during church service. Statistically there is a good chance some "Christians" will be left behind -- even in the most theologically sound churches. Maybe they're the people the Lord describes in Matthew 7:21-23. People who believed they were saved by their actions, deeds, church membership or ecclesiastical observances? Or maybe at some point they said the "sinner's prayer" but never understood what it really meant. Or maybe they are people who attended church, heard the gospel but never made a profession of faith in Christ? Or maybe they are in a denomination that teaches salvation can come from many sources or in many ways - but not through Jesus. Either way, the fact that millions of people just vanished in the Rapture would undoubtedly be enough to convince many people the gospel is real. Then once they realize this and come to Jesus they will begin to witness to those around them and the gospel will spread even further. They may even be part of the martyrs we saw at the fifth Seal bowing before God to seek vengeance for those being killed for the testimony [witnessing] of Christ. There may even be another group who see what is happening around them, seek an answer and find it in Jesus. I find it amazing that Bible sales reportedly increased 143% during the first three months of the COVID pandemic. That means there are probably millions of people who are seeking an answer and all of a sudden realize the answer may be in Jesus. If that many people were buying Bibles just because we've had a virus, think about what might happen after the Rapture and during the Tribulation judgments. Although I'm confident the antichrist will do everything in his power -- including murder -- to remove any latent gospel message from the earth, the fact is God's word "...will not return to me empty..." (Isaiah 55:11), because He is not "...wanting anyone to perish..."; even during the Tribulation (2

Peter 3:9). Why is that? Well, think back on the "forces" we saw released by the first six Seals -- false-peace, war, famine, pestilence, vengeance and fear. Now, because of God's desire that none would perish we see another "force". A beautiful force --- the power of Mercy. Grace-filled Mercy that will be offered by God one last time before He destroys mankind. Can you even imagine the power of this mercy? Even at a time when most men "...gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done." (Revelation 16:10-11).

Billions of people will not be saved during the Tribulation. They will, "...perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie." (2 Thessalonians 2:12). With this delusion salvation will be difficult because even in the middle of judgment destruction mankind will desperately cling to the antichrist as their messiah even though they realize the judgments come "...from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" But even in this time of great resistance God will show mercy. Mercy to Jews and Gentiles alike as He seeks to bring them to Him. As a result, the gospel will be preached during the Tribulation and some will come to the Lord. They will be the ones "...from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb..." "...These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9 and 14).

It is these "...who can stand it...".

Now, let's see who one group of these Tribulation evangelists will be...

Chapter 7, Verses 1-8

7. 1. "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. 2. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and sea. 3. Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the forehead of the servants of our God. 4. Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

- 5. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,
from the tribe of Gad 12,000,
- 6. from the tribe of Asher 12,000,
from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,
from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,
- 7. from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,
from the tribe of Levi 12,000,
from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,
- 8. from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000,

7.1a. - "After this..."

We see the same phrase "After this..." in chapters 4, 7, 18, 19, indicating a significant change in John's vision. At this point John recognizes the vision of the first six Seals is complete. He has seen an overview of most of the Tribulation period and will now be given insight into specific events that will occur along the timeline. But before he is shown the final judgment actions he will see how God will show mercy and grace.

7.1b. - "...I saw four angels..."

Angels are mentioned numerous times in the Book of Revelation and in many cases play an important role in God's judgment actions.

For example:

- We've already seen the testifying angel speaking to John (1:1),
- The angelic Four Living Creatures (4:6),
- The mighty angel seeking the worthy scroll opener (5:2),
- The "...thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand time ten thousand..." [Millions] of angels encircling the throne of God (5:11).
- Now we see four angels who control the wind. They are part of a larger group of other judgment angels who include:
 - The angel who will punish earth with a golden censer (8:3)
 - Seven angels blowing the seven Trumpets of blasting destruction (8:7),
 - The angel who announces the coming of final judgment (10:5),
 - Michael and his army who cast satan and his demons from heaven (12:7),
 - The angel who proclaims the gospel (14:6), (one of the key evangelical sources)
 - The angel who announces the destruction of the antichrist's Mystery Babylon empire (14:8-9),
 - The angel who announces the reaping of the earth (14:15),
 - The seven angels who pour the final seven Bowl wrath judgments (15-16),
 - The angel with great authority (18:1),
 - The angel who throws a great boulder into the sea (18:21),
 - The angel who will announce the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (19:9).
 - The angel who summons the birds of the world to gorge on the dead armies of the antichrist (19:17),
 - The angel who bounds satan for a thousand years (20:1),

Whew! That's a lot of angels. I tell you all of this now to illustrate the mighty power of God's angels and the key role they will play in judgment, but also to whet your appetite for what's coming in the chapters ahead.

7.1c. - "... standing at the four corners of the earth..."

Of course, this does not mean John thought the earth was flat and had four corners. There are several proposed explanations for what this means but to me it simply speaks of direction; as in the four quadrant points of a compass. Unless you're at the poles, no matter where you stand on earth with a compass there are always four directions - North, East, South, and West. This probably means these angels had power over all the earth no matter where they were.

7.1.d. - "...holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree."

Just as "...the four corners..." indicate direction, so does "...the four winds...". Typically we describe wind by its directional origin --- like, "southerly winds", "westerly winds", "a nor-easter". I believe that is the description here. The four corners let us know the angels have power over the entire earth's surface. The four winds then let us know what power it is -- the judgment power of wind. We see this with the seven Trumpet judgments, - "The first angel sounded his Trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up." (8:7). Likewise, the second Trumpet causes a burning mountain-sized mass to fall into the sea killing one-third of the sea creatures. Undoubtedly both these bring great destruction on the land and the sea, and they will also bring great storms, with fire, that will produce wind. One of the phenomena we see in nature is that a large enough fire produces its own wind. That's because enough heat pushing upward exhausts the air around it which creates empty space within the fire; a reaction called an "updraft". Enough of these in an area can then cause what it called a "firestorm" which is basically a wind system self-generated by the heat of the fire. For example, carpet bombing of German cities in WWII often resulted in firestorms of super-heated hurricane force winds. Eye witnesses speak of destruction miles from the cities not caused by the bombs themselves, but by the extremely destructive fire-created winds. Given that, we can only imagine the wind generated by the Trumpet fires that destroy a third of the land, trees and grass. (8:5 / 8:7 / 11:19 / 16:17-21). Mark reminds us that as with all other elements wind obeys the commands of Jesus (Mark 4:41). So too, Jeremiah prophesied of the destructive winds of God's judgment and uses a description similar to John's, "I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four corners of the heavens..." (Jeremiah 49:36). As did Daniel, "In my vision at night I looked and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea." (Daniel 7:2). Obviously, the "winds" of God are an important part of His destructive force, but here we see four angels with the power to hold back His winds. But why? Two things came to mind: Possibly because wind plays such an important role in our life-giving atmosphere and ecosystem. Without wind there is no movement of clouds, no cyclic process of evaporation and rain, and no refreshment of the land and sea. This in itself would be a powerfully destructive judgment. But also because the angels will not release the judgment of Trumpets and Bowls until the right point in God's perfect timing. After God "marks" and protects the Jewish witnesses who will share the gospel during this terrible time. (See 7:3a below).

7.2.a. - " Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God."

This angel is a messenger who comes from the east – like the rising of the sun - but also, it may be speaking of John's vantage point as he looks east towards his beloved Jerusalem. This angel has God's seal, representing His seal of ownership that will be used to mark the protected witnesses. This marking will be the name of Jesus and the Father written on their foreheads. (Revelation 14:1). It will be opposite of the marking placed on the right hand or forehead of the antichrist's sinful followers. (Revelation 13:16-18). The mark on the 144,000 will be the mark of God, and with it they will stand out as belonging to God. There will be no hiding it. It will be a mark there for all to see. A mark that not only identifies them as God's witnesses but a mark that will protect them from satan (Revelation 9:4). It will be a mark no one else on earth has --- a mark of obedient defiance against the sinful antichrist. These who are marked by God will be the faithful Jewish converts "...purchased from among mankind and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb." (Revelation 14:4).

7.2.b. - "He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and sea."

This angel has authority of command and has been sent to set the timing of God's wrath. Now we see illustrated what we said above about the four directions and the four winds. These angels have been given divine power to bring judgment on the land and sea in all directions -- the whole earth.

7.3. - "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the forehead of the servants of our God."

God is about to release another set of destructive forces. These will become the final judgments of the seventh Seal - the seven Trumpet blasts and the seven Bowl judgments. These are the destructions we'll see in later chapters that destroy a third of trees and grass [vegetation] (Revelation 8:7), that turn a third of the sea into blood and cause a third of the sea creatures die (Revelation 8:8-9), who will turn a third of the fresh water to poison (Revelation 8:10-11), and release the captive demons of hell onto the earth (Revelation 9:6). And this is just a sampling of what the angels will release. --- But not until God marks 144,000 Jewish converts to Christ so the whole world will know who they are as they bring their message of the gospel to a quickly dying universe. This mark will be on their foreheads and there will be no doubt what the mark means. They will have the name of the Father and the name of the Lamb written on them by the hand of God (Revelation 14:1). This may seem odd, but let's think about a few other examples where we have seen God identify (mark) people for all to see:

- God "marked" Jacob with a limp when he was blessed and his name changed to Israel. (Genesis 32:22-31).
- When God destroyed the first-born of Egypt He spared those whose homes were "marked" with the blood of the spotless Lamb (Exodus 12:22).
- When Moses came down from Sinai with the tablets of the Law God "marked" his face with radiant light so all Israel would know he was a spokesman for the Lord (Exodus 34:29-32).
- When God spared the family of Rahab He "marked" her home with a scarlet cord hung from her window (Joshua 2:18).
- At a point in time when Israel became idolatrous God sent angels to go throughout the land and "mark" the remnant who were faithful, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it. As I listened, He said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter the old men, the young men and women, the mothers and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark." (Ezekiel 9:3-6).
- And although not exactly the same as the "mark" of Revelation maybe the most poignant "markings" of all are illustrated in two beautiful stories.
 - "Unless I see the nail "marks" in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."..."Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:25-27)
 - "...for I bear on my body the "marks" of Jesus." (Paul speaking in Galatians 6:17)

In each case, the "mark" signifies those faithful to God.

7.4.a. - " Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." Chapter 14 provides a little more insight into who the 144,000 will be. -- "Then I looked and there

before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth." (Revelation 14:1-3).

We will study this group in more detail when we get to chapter 14. But for now we need to understand they will be 144,000 Jews who have come to accept Christ during the Tribulation, and who will go to spread the gospel of Jesus. Pastor David Jeremiah describes them as: "They are 144,000 Jewish Billy Graham's let loose on the earth to share the message of Jesus." One other thing I want you to notice is their song. A "new song". Here as in chapter 5 we see a "new song" of the redeemed -- "...and with your blood You purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation..." (Revelation 5:9). The song of the redeemed. Redeemed from the earth --- redeemed from sin.

7.5.a. - "From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,
from the tribe of Gad 12,000,
from the tribe of Asher 12,000,
from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,
from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,
from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,
from the tribe of Levi 12,000,
from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,
8. from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000,"

I've thought a lot about how much detail to go into for verses 5-8. Frankly, a lot could be written about the 12 Tribes of Israel; who they are, and what they did. It's a fascinating and deep story, but for now let's understand who they are in reference to their Revelation role.

The twelve tribes of Israel are descendants of the sons of Jacob and through him the two sons of Joseph. Jacob was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, whose name was changed to "Israel" by God when he wrestled with Jesus at the Fords of Jabbok (Genesis 32:22). From that point on, Israel (Jacob) and his sons would be the picture of God's chosen people. His messengers to the world. It was Jacob who brought his family to Egypt to escape famine. There he found his long-lost son Joseph who he thought had died years before. It was Joseph, two of his two children and his brothers who would eventually become the nation of Israel, but not before spending over 400 years in captivity and many years of wandering in the wilderness of disobedience. Once the twelve tribes became a "nation" they went through generation after generation of obedience and disobedience, blessings and curse, unity and separation. It was Israel, the twelve tribes, who eventually crucified their Messiah because they had become so zealously religious they were faithfully ignorant. The tribes were scattered in AD70 when Israel was destroyed. Not to be restored until 1948. Yet even today Israel is in a cycle of disobedience, and for the most part has lost their tribal recognition.

But God knows who they are and during the Tribulation a portion of Jews will finally come to know Jesus. From these God will call 144,000 evangelists who will spread the gospel through the Tribulation period and lead many to Jesus. Here we see 12,000 (a multiple of the number for completeness) from each Tribe; totaling 144,000 faithful Jewish followers who will be a thorn in the side of the antichrist. They will survive all of his attacks and the judgments of God as they spread the gospel of Jesus to the world. And on the day when Jesus plants His victorious feet on the Mount of Olives who will be with Him? The 144,000. Not 143,999, but all 144,000. Each and every one of them will count themselves among the faithful – those who can stand it.

LESSON 44

Revelation, Chapter 7, verses 9-17

In our previous lesson we discussed one of the key evangelical groups who will spread the gospel during the Tribulation - the 144,000 converted Jews. They, with the Two Witnesses (Revelation 11), the proclaiming angel (Revelation 14:6) and the testimony of the martyrs, (Revelation 6:9), will spread the message of Jesus during the most difficult period of man's history. As a result of their ministry many will come to know the Lord, and the time of greatest destruction will also become the time of greatest revival.

So let's look at who they are...

Chapter 7, Verses 9-17

9. "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11. All of the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12. saying: Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" 13. Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?" 14. I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." 15. "Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. 16. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. 17. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

9.a. "After this I looked..."

John has completed his vision of the 144,000 and now turns to see the results of their ministry. -- And it is a sight to behold.

9.b. - "...and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count..."

At the end of chapter 6 John asked, "...and who can stand it?". Considering the fact no believers were left on earth after the Rapture we would think few would come to the Lord during a time of unabated sin and persecution. But they do. So many in fact that John says no one could count them. That's interesting considering the fact John indicated the quantity of angels in heaven when he said, "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand." [Millions] (Revelation 5:11). Yet now John sees so many people he says no one could estimate their number.

Think about what this view might have meant to John. As far as we know he was the last of the original Apostles. He had seen all of the others killed, had witnessed Christ on the cross, and was

currently serving a sentence on the Roman penal colony of Patmos for preaching the gospel (Revelation 1:9). He lived at a time when millions of Christians were being slaughtered, and at a time when the fledgling church was under great persecution. In fact, of the seven churches Jesus spoke to in John's vision, only two were faithful. (Chap 2&3). Given these first-century facts John was very aware that the total population of Christians across the known world was very small and for the most part were either falling away or being killed. But now he sees millions. A population of believers so large he cannot even begin to estimate their number. Can you imagine the joy this brought to his heart. A man who knew the struggles and trials of a few faithful followers now realizes that group will grow to be millions and millions. By this point Jesus had helped John see how the future would unfold in a series of cataclysmic destructions, but now Jesus gives also him a brief glimpse of what else is to come --- the Tribulation saints.

As with many passages in Revelation there are a number of interpretations about what verse 9 means. So let's look at a few:

- Some believe the multitude is the Raptured church. The total believers who have come out of the church-age.
- Others take this even further and believe the timing of this vision, after the sixth Seal, is indication of a mid-tribulational church Rapture.
- Others believe the multitude John sees are on earth at the end of the Tribulation. In their view, these could be the survivors who "...have come out of..." the great Tribulation, and survived to go into the Millennium (Matthew 24:22). Isaiah speaks of a time when Jesus will gather both Jew and Gentile to Him, "In that day the Root of Jesse [Jesus] will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His resting place will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out His hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of His people..." (Isaiah 11:10 / Rev 5:5) Although this passage speaks specifically of Israel's remnant, it also mentions "...the nations...", which is a title for Gentiles. We see this emphasized later in Isaiah 49:6 when the Lord says He will "...bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth." Also, in His Olivet Discourse Jesus indicates there will be those who will survive to the end of the Tribulation, "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:22).
- Others believe the qualifier "...before the throne..." indicates John's view has shifted back to heaven where he sees believers before the throne of God who were saved during the Tribulation and who are now in heaven. Given other comments later in these verses I tend to believe this is the most probable explanation. Particularly given an earlier view of martyrs in heaven praying for vengeance (6:9). --- Of course, just because the multitude is "before" the throne doesn't necessarily mean they are in heaven. Certainly other verses in the Bible speak of approaching God or His throne without us physically being there. For example, the writer of Hebrews says, "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). Obviously, if we go to God in "...our time of need..." it must not be speaking of being in heaven, where we would have no needs. Instead it speaks to us being able to go before our Lord with confidence in His love and mercy. Likewise David, who was clearly on earth when he wrote Psalms 18, spoke of God in His temple; hearing his prayers. (Psalms 18:6).

Although that is true, I believe verses 14-15 clear it up for me, "These are they who have come out of the great Tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [been saved] Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in

His temple;..." (Revelation 7:14-15). These are probably the same believers who were "...the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 20:4a). You'll note they are called "...souls..." in verse 4. That's because they are in heaven but were not part of the Rapture, with their resurrection body, because they will be resurrected at the Millennium and, "...came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years..." (Revelation 20:4b).

So, for the purpose of our discussions let's just assume these are the multitudes of people, from every nation and every people group who will be saved during the Tribulation.

9.c. - "...from every nation, tribe, people and language....,"

The Bible speaks of two key people groups - Jews [Israel] and non-Jews [everyone else]; often describing non-Jews, Gentiles, as the "nations, tribes, people and languages". Let's look at a few examples:

- In Genesis 12 God promises to bless a "great nation" through Abram (later Abraham). In this case He is speaking of Israel, but then says, "...and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you..." (Genesis 12:2-3).
- Psalms 67 says God's salvation will be "...among all nations" (Psalms 67:2).
- Likewise, Psalms 68 calls for all people to "Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth." (Psalms 68:32).
- In His great commission Jesus tells His followers to "...go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19).
- Jesus commissions Paul to be "...my chosen instrument to carry My Name before the Gentiles." (Acts 9:15)
- In Revelation the Lord says His proclaiming angel will spread the gospel "...to every nation, tribe, language and people." (Revelation 14:6).
- And these four groups are mentioned again and again in Revelation - 5:9 / 11:9 / 13:7 / 14:6 / 10:11 / 17:15

The point is, a key focus of Revelation is the redemption of Israel's remnant. This is the time of "Jacob's Troubles" (Jeremiah 30:7), when after centuries of disobedience a portion of Israel will finally recognize Jesus as their Messiah. But in the midst of unprecedented turmoil and destruction, post-Rapture mankind, Gentiles by the millions, from every "...nation, tribe, language and people" will also come to the Lord. They will come to Jesus at a time when Christians will be hated more than they have ever been, and a time when salvation probably means certain death. Yet, in spite of that there will be a revival like has never been seen before.

9.d. - "...standing before the throne and before the Lamb..."

In chapters 4 and 5 we saw a vivid scene of God's throne room and the heavenly host surrounding His throne. Now we see believers before His throne and before Jesus. But unlike the martyr's souls, "...under the altar.", and praying (Revelation 6:9), they are now standing and worshipping their God who has pulled them out of the Tribulation and into His presence.

9.e. - "They were wearing white robes..."

As we've seen in other areas of Revelation, white robes indicate those who have been saved through the blood of the Lamb.

- We saw this in Jesus' promise to the faithful minority in the church at Sardis, "They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy." (Revelation 3:4).
- He promises the sinful of Laodicea if they will turn from their laziness they could have, "...white clothes to wear." (Revelation 3:18).
- The Twenty-Four Elders (arguably the Raptured church) are "...dressed in white..." (Revelation 4:4).
- The martyrs praying under the altar were "...given a white robe..." (Revelation 6:11).
- The church, the bride of Christ, will make "...herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given to her to wear" (Revelation 19:7-8).
- As are the armies of believers who come back with Jesus to watch him destroy all sin. They [we] will be "...riding on white horses and dressed in linen, white and clean." (Revelation 19:14).

Given these and other references it is apparent the multitudes before the throne have been saved during the Tribulation and are now before God.

9.F. - "...and were holding palm branches in their hands."

Palm branches are a sign of praise and homage. During the Feast of Tabernacles; a time to celebrate Israel's deliverance from Egypt, they were commanded to, "On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days." (Leviticus 23:40). When Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem the people gathered branches from palms and other trees to again celebrate their deliverance according to the "...words they found written in the Law." (Nehemiah 8:13-15). And most sadly, when Jesus the Messiah prophetically rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the people of Israel "...took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel.'" (John 12:12-14). For a brief moment the people seemed to understand who Jesus is - the King of Israel, the Messiah, the prophesied God in flesh. Yet, just a few days later they would call for His crucifixion. --- Now, many generations later millions from around the world, and the remnant of Israel will raise palm branches for one reason - to praise the Name of our Lord and for their deliverance from hell.

10.a. - "And they cried out in a loud voice:..."

Apparently the Lord likes loud praise! Here are just a few examples of those who worshiped in a loud voice:

- The martyrs under the altar "...called out in a loud voice..." (Revelation 6:9-10).
- At the dedication of Jerusalem the singers sang loud (Nehemiah 12:42).
- All through the Psalms we see loud praise - Psalms 33 tells us to "...shout for joy!...", Psalms 98 tells us to "...shout for joy", make "blasts with ram's horn...", "Let the sea resound...",
- The man cured of leprosy came back to thank Jesus and "...praising God in a loud voice, he threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him..." (Luke 17:15-16).
- And when Jesus approached Bethphage the people "...began to praise God in loud voices...". When the wicked Pharisees told Jesus to make the worshipers be quiet He said, "...if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:37-40).

Can you imagine the sound of millions and millions of martyred believers standing before the throne of God and crying out in a loud, singular, worshipful voice. Can you imagine what John felt when he saw and heard this. Can you imagine what we will see as the Raptured church in

heaven with Jesus as we prepare for His holy war (Revelation 19). "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." We are ready. (Revelation 22:20).

10.b. - "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Pay attention to the object of their praise. It's not their mansion in the sky, or pearly gates, streets of gold or even the Tree of Life. Their focus is on God, the persons of the Father and Jesus, and through them the Holy Spirit. As we have discussed, our desire to spend eternity in heaven should not be focused on the physical realities of God's kingdom -- it should be focused on Jesus. Likewise, our desire not to go to hell should not be to avoid punishment and pain, but to avoid a broken relationship with God for eternity.

11.a. - "All of the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures..."

In chapters 4 and 5 we met with Four Living Creatures and the Twenty Four Elders (Revelation 4:4-6). Personally I see evidence of the Twenty Four Elders being the Raptured church. Particularly through their song of salvation praise (Revelation 5:9-10). I broke this down in more detail in an earlier lesson. But the purpose of verse 11 is to set the stage and help us visualize the context in which the millions of believers are praising.

11.b. - "They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God. 12. "...saying: Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!..."

We've seen this reaction before as the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty Four Elders fell on their faces as "...every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all of them, singing, "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13-14). Now we see the same scene repeated but with millions upon millions of voices.

13. "...Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?" - 14.a. - "I answered, "Sir, you know."

Interestingly one of the elders asked John who these singers were and where did they come from. But John, undoubtedly in awe at what he saw did not even try to answer but basically said "Sir, please tell me".

14.b. - "And he said, "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

15.a. - "Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple;..." (Revelation 11:19)

This verse clarifies several things:

- These people have come out of the Tribulation. They were not Raptured but have been saved as a result of their faith.
- And they did this by having, "...washed their robes.." by seeking redemption in Jesus through the confession of their sin and by accepting Jesus as their Savior.
- Which is what made them white - washed their sins clean - in the holy blood of the slain Lamb of God (Matthew 24:14 / Titus 2:11-14 / John 3:16-17 / Revelation 1:5 / 5:9 / 19:13 / Romans 3:24-25 / Romans 5:9).

These are the ones, saved during the most horrific period of mankind, who "...can stand it...".

15.b. - "...and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with His presence. 16. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat."

Here we see glimpses of the judgment punishment. They were hungry and thirsty during the famine Seal, the sun scorched their bodies through the cataclysmic destructions of the fourth Bowl (Revelation 16:8). But no more. Now the faithful who have come to know Jesus through this terrible time have been rescued by God and are now in His holy presence. Never to endure suffering again. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. "Yes", says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." (Revelation 14:13). Most will die during the Tribulation, but those who die in the Lord will reap God's eternal blessing.

17.a. - "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water..."

- At no other time will the Psalmist's words ring more true or sweet, "The Lord is my Shepherd...", "...He leads me beside still waters...", "...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalms 23).
- "For I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me..." (John 10:14).
- "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep..." (Hebrews 13:20).

17.c. - "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

And there will be tears. Not for the loved ones left behind, but because they mourn at the recognition of their sins when they see the marks on Jesus put there by them (us). "They will look at me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:8-10). But even in this moment of painful reflection Jesus, in His totally sovereign grace will ensure them they are forgiven and will spend eternity with Him.

LESSON 45

Revelation chapter 8, verses 1-5

We're now entering the final phase of the seven year Great Tribulation -- the seventh Seal. But this Seal is much different than the others we've seen. When Jesus breaks this Seal He will release fourteen additional judgments defined as seven "Trumpets" and seven "Bowls". I think we can picture these in our minds as fourteen rapid events, one after another, that come like a trumpet blast and like destruction poured out of a bowl onto the earth. They will be the most catastrophic events creation will ever see. But their conclusion will usher-in an event every believer eagerly anticipates -- the Second Coming of Christ; our Warrior King who will take-back what is rightfully His. Chapter 8 begins a lengthy narrative that not only covers the seventh Seal, but also provides details of events and characters that will emerge from the opening of the final Seal through the coming of Christ as the Holy Warrior Judge in chapter 19.

But before we start chapter 8, let's go back and quickly refresh our memories on some of the key events that have led us to this point.

Chapter 1

Key Take-aways:

- God's "Revelation" is not only about end-times events, but it is a revelation of Jesus.
- It provides a promised blessing to all who read it, hear it and take it to heart. Sadly, this is a blessing most Christians probably never seek and may never receive.
- John is in his 90's and a prisoner on the Island of Patmos as he writes the revelation God gives him.
- And now we begin to see Jesus in ways we have not seen Him before. As the divine Judge who is preparing to bring God's wrath upon all creation.

Chapters 2 and 3

Key Take-aways:

- The book was revealed to seven churches -- and through them to the church through all ages.
- These are real churches with real people.
- Taken together they characterize the spiritual maturity successes and failures of the "church" over time and of any individual church or denomination.
- Through them the letters are written to us too. For awareness and instruction.
- Their commendations and condemnations also provide clear guidance for us today.
- They show that even hard work, toil, perseverance and love in a church can all be for naught if we don't understand that Jesus must be our focus.

Chapter 4

Key Take-aways:

- John's view of heaven's glory is stunning and profound. We must step back and ponder on what he sees in chapter 4 in order to fully appreciate what he sees in chapter 5.
- We met the Twenty Four Elders, who (at least in my mind) represent the Raptured church.
- We also met the angelic Four Living Creatures. We will see both of these groups many times as we work through Revelation.

Chapter 5

Key Take-aways:

- We met two new Revelation characters:
 - The Mighty Angel
 - The angels around the throne
- John wept when he thought no one could be found to open the scroll of judgment.
- But he must have jumped for joy when he realized the Lamb he saw is the Lion of Judah and is the Root of David -- He is the Lamb of God. A recognition that Israel has still not made to this day.

Chapter 6

Key Take-aways:

- The church is now Raptured and Jesus begins His judgment upon creation.
- This is the time of the Tribulation. A seven year period known as "The Seventieth Week of Daniel" and "Jacob's Troubles". The seven years is divided into two 3-1/2 year segments, with the last half often called the "Great" Tribulation.
- Six of the seven judgment "Seals" will now be released. These will bring major "forces" upon the earth:
 - 1st Seal - False-peace
 - 2nd Seal – War
 - 3rd Seal – Famine
 - 4th Seal - Pestilence and death
 - 5th Seal - Martyr's prayers for vengeance
 - 6th Seal – Fear
- During this period the antichrist comes to power and establishes an empire ruled by satan.

Near the 3-1/2 year mid-point the antichrist will go into the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God. This is an event called "The Abomination that Causes Desolation".

- All post-Rapture believers who come to Christ during the Tribulation -- often called "Tribulation Saints" -- will come under great persecution and be targeted for death.
- It is also during chapter 6 that God begins His most destructive judgments. These start with the sixth Seal and will culminate in the Trumpet and Bowl judgments released by the seventh Seal.
- At the end of chapter 6 we see sinful mankind praying to the earth even though they recognize judgment is coming from God on His throne and from Jesus, the Lamb. This shows just how far they will have become separated from God.
- Chapter 6 ends with John's profound question, "...and who can stand it?".

Chapter 7

Key Take-aways:

- Chapter 6 presented a series of judgments that are hard to wrap our head around, but chapter 7 provides a brief interlude. In the midst of all this war, famine, pestilence and unbelievable destruction God provides something completely different --- His Mercy.
- God will always provide a chance for redemption. From the days when He covered Adam and Eve with a blood sacrifice, to the day He offered Cain every opportunity to turn to Him, through

the cycles of disobedience by Israel, up through Christ on the cross, God has provided a means for salvation. And He will again during the post-Rapture Tribulation.

- He provides His grace in several ways: (1) 144,000 converted Jews who preach the gospel, (2) Two Witnesses who bring truth to Israel, (3) a proclaiming angel who announces the gospel to the whole world, and (4) through the testimony of those saved during the Tribulation.
- From this we see multitudes of believers so large no one can count them. This is the hope of God's mercy; that even in times of such great judgment and destruction God offers grace and redemption to the lost.

Chapter 8

Let's set the context within which chapter 8 will occur: --- The "Day of the Lord" will begin. The antichrist will be in full power with most of the world under his demonic control. He will command a global empire through politics, finances, military power and false-religion. Through his evil underling, the false-prophet, all people on earth will be required to worship the antichrist - the "beast" - as god, and when they do each will receive his "mark" of approval on their hand and forehead. A mark that if you don't have on your body will make you an outcast; unable to buy and sell and undoubtedly targeted for death. As this is happening, sin grows without bounds as the earth and universe go through the first six Seal-judgments of Christ. It is hard to imagine what the world will be like at this time. A time when the power of satan grows nearly unchecked. A time when the people of the world and the world itself will be under extreme punishment yet they continue to follow evil. But within the midst of sin and destruction God will still provide mercy and redemption opportunities for both Jews and Gentiles alike. And as He does they will accept Jesus by the millions, until the number standing before God cannot be counted.

Now in chapter 8 we will begin to see destruction at a level we have not seen before. God's fury and holy wrath intensifies through a series of rapid-fire judgments that are more frequent and much more destructive. These are the final "birth pangs" Jesus spoke about, when the pains have grown quick and intense. Yet, the antichrist will continue to rise in power, sin will run rampant across the earth, war, famine and death will increase, the false-prophet and his satanic religion will emerge, new Tribulation believers will be martyred and we will see the full intense fury of God's wrath as the world and universe will be torn apart.

Chapter 8, verses 1-5

1. "When He opened 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, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. 4. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it to earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightening and an earthquake."

1. "When He opened the seventh Seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

Two things stand out to me in this verse - "silence" and "half an hour".

1.a. - "Silence" - I find this to be one of the most unusual verses in the Bible. It's intriguing, but after centuries of study we really don't know what it means. In fact, 19th century Biblical commentator J.A. Seiss went so far as to say - "This silence, nevertheless, has made a good deal of noise in the world, especially among commentators. It would be difficult to find another point

upon which there have been so many different and discordant voices." - That said, I think we can use this verse as it is written to help us picture in our minds the context in which the seventh seal is broken.

First, let's look back at chapters 4 and 5 to reflect on the level of activity around God's throne. Activities that would have undoubtedly produced a lot of noise:

- To begin with there were "...flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder..." (Revelation 4:5).
- The Four Living Creature circling the throne who said praises to God "Day and night..." (Revelation 4:8).
- As they did, the Twenty Four Elders sang praises to the Father with their songs and harps (Revelation 4:10 / 5:8).
- Then there was "...the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand..." [millions] encircling the throne and saying praises "...in a loud voice..." (Revelation 5:12).
- As each of the first four Seals were opened the Four Living Creatures announced them "...in a voice like thunder..." (Revelation 6:1).
- Then at the fifth Seal the martyrs under the altar "...called out in a loud voice... for God's vengeance (Revelation 6:10).
- And finally, there were the voices of "...a great multitude that no one could count...", as they "...cried out in a loud voice..." (Revelation 7:9-10).

Just picture in your mind what all of that will sound like --- and then try to imagine the deafening void of total silence when all in heaven stop at once to contemplate what is about to happen. The prophet Zephaniah gives us a hint of what is to come when he speaks of The Day of the Lord, "Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near" (Zephaniah 1:7). Psalms 76 also gives further insight "From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet..." (Psalms 76:8). And although he was speaking primarily of earth and not heaven, Zechariah helps set the mood when he says, "Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling" (Zechariah 2:13).

All is now silent as God's heavenly entourage takes time to reflect on something that has never happened before and will never happen again - the unleashed fury of God's holy wrath on all creation. After untold millennia of waiting and preparation the great Day of the Lord is coming. The days of sin, pain and suffering are about to come to an end, and the days of satan's influence are numbered. Now the final judgments from Jesus will obliterate mankind and the antichrist, the Lord's kingdom will then be established for a thousand years before satan is destroyed, sinful mankind is judged and all creation will be made new and free of sin. As they contemplate this the heavenly host, Raptured church and Tribulation martyrs realize what is about to happen and they are in awe to the point their only reverent reaction can be total and deafening silence. It is literally, the calm before the storm. --- As Job said, "I am unworthy - how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth." (Job 40:4).

1.b. - "...for about half an hour..."

Oddly, I've never given my thought about heaven having a pattern of time. At least not the way we measure time. God and heaven are eternal. They have no beginning or end, which means you cannot even describe heavenly events in known time-keeping terms. Even trillions of years would not be a good start. And yet, now at this critical time in God's creation plan the Bible recognizes

a distinct period of time "...for about half an hour...", within which God's heavenly occupants will be in the silence of awe. I think this is put here to give us additional context in which to view the period of silence. Even if heaven doesn't need to measure time, we do, so John describes what he sees and explains it in a meaningful way we can understand. Also, we can think about the fact that half an hour - thirty minutes - would seem like an eternity if you were totally silent and focused. It would be sufficient time for contemplation. Hours or days are not needed to understand what is about to happen. Thirty minutes would be enough. In fact, given the events that are about to take place, thirty minutes would be a long time to anticipate the coming battle and the recognition of the Warrior King.

2. "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them."

2.a. - "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God..."

These are not just any angels. They are specific angels "...who stand before God...". In chapters 4 and 5 we saw the Four Loving Creatures; angelic beings around God's throne, and we saw the "...many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand...", encircling the throne. Obviously, angels around God's throne are common, but these angels seem different. They are singled-out for a defined role, and as they wait to begin their task they are seen standing before God - an army of seven ready for His orders. Maybe they are like Gabriel who would "...stand in the presence of God..."? (Luke 1:19). It's interesting to recall his connection to the larger story. Gabriel was the angel sent by God to tell Daniel the vision of the seventy weeks (Daniel 9:21). He was also given the task of alerting Zechariah of the birth of John the Baptist and of bringing Mary the news that her son would be the Holy Messiah (Luke 1:11 and 26). So it appears that an angel who stands before God has a pretty unique role.

2.b. - "...and seven trumpets were given to them."

Each had a Trumpet that was "given" to them [presumably by God]. This is not their Trumpet, but is given to them like a weapon for battle, and with the Trumpet they are now ready to announce God's orders for destruction. Historically Trumpets played a big role in ancient cultures --- sometimes to signal a gathering or celebration, or to signal time for an announcement and often to move warriors into battle. In fact, in the days before modern battlefield communication systems trumpets were used to direct armies in the field. We see an example of this when Joshua attacked Jericho. God commanded the army of Israel to "Have seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark . On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse..." (Joshua 6:4-5). Similarly, when Moses went before God on Mt. Sinai "...there was thunder and lighting, with a very thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast..." (Exodus 19:16). Obviously, the sound of a trumpet blast often signals God is about to move. As it is now with the angels before His throne.

3.a. - "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar..."

We could go into a lot of detail on this portion of the verse by digging deep into Old Testament Levitical duties and their purpose, but for this lesson we'll hit the high-spots.

Here we see an eighth special angel with a very unique role. He is the angel whose actions will initiate the final wrath of God. He has a censor which was a devise, sort of like a hanging lamp, used by the priest to transport hot coals from the bronze altar of burnt offering (Exodus 27:3) to the altar of incense which was in the interior "Holy Place" of the tabernacle. (Exodus 30:1-10).

These items on earth were made to exact specifications given to Moses by God (Exodus 25:9/40). This was to be "...a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8). Now we see the originals, the altars at the throne of God. His heavenly tabernacle where His people gather to honor and worship Him. The table of incense was used by the priest to burn a fragrant incense every morning (Exodus 30:7), so "...incense will burn regularly before the Lord for the generations to come." (Exodus 30:8). The incense, made of "...spices - gum resin, onycha and galbanum - and pure frankincense..." (Exodus 30:34). It was holy and reserved for God. He forbid anyone from making for their own pleasure or as an unauthorized offering (Leviticus 10:1-2). Here the incense is an offering but it also represents the prayers of God's people. We saw reference to this in chapter 5 when the One worthy to open the scroll - the Lamb - was identified, and the Twenty-Four Elders "...fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people (Revelation 5:8). We also see reference to this action when Zechariah, the priest and father of John the Baptist, was performing his temple duties. This included going "...into the temple of the Lord to burn incense. And when the time for the burning came, all of the assembled worshipers were praying outside." (Luke 1:9-10). This is basically the same scene we see with the angel at the throne. He is making an offering to God - an offering of the prayers of man.

3.b.- "He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. 4. "The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand."

And through these actions God is glorified. The offering to God and the prayers of the believers are in honor of the all Holy Lord. They went up to Him as true obedience, "...from the angels hand." - "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." (Psalms 141:2).

5.- "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it to earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightening and an earthquake."

But now this censer takes on a new role. Holy fire of heavenly offerings to God is put in the censer and it is hurled to earth as a signal of the destruction to come. Maybe this will be one of the asteroids or other cosmic object which is hurled at the earth from space (Revelation 6:13), or maybe it is simply what is says, great fire hurled to earth at God's command. With this action God's full judgment wrath will start. As we saw in the sixth Seal this will include great natural disasters with storms, thunder, lightning and earthquakes like nothing we have ever seen before. It is this angel, with the censer of prayer and offerings that physically begins the final judgment actions and releases the four angels holding back the winds of judgment, who in-turn release the seven angels to blast destruction upon the earth.

LESSON 46

Revelation, chapter 8 verses 6-13

Recap of verses 1-5

In the first five verses of chapter 8 we saw an amazing sight in God's throne room. As Jesus prepares to open the seventh and final Seal all in heaven realize what is about to happen and fall silent. There is total silence in heaven as they contemplate the fact the time has come for the destruction of all creation. After the silence ends, seven angels are given seven Trumpets and an eighth angel makes offerings of incense and prayers on the altar of God. He then places some of the fire from God's heavenly altar into his censer and hurls it to the earth.

The time for total destruction has come.

Chapter 8, verses 6-13

6. "Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. 7. The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down to earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. 8. The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. 10. The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11. the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. 12. The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. 13. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: 'Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blast about to be sounded by the other three angels!'"

6. "Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them."

The stage is now set for the seven angels to blow their seven Trumpet blasts. Each one will announce multiple judgments as Jesus releases increasingly more powerful and deadly destructions upon the earth. Yet as He does He also offers continued mercy so that each blast will only destroy one-third of its target. The other two-thirds are thereby given warning; providing even more time to absorb the gospel being spread by God's messengers. This is reflective of Habakkuk's prayer that God will, "...in wrath remember mercy." (Habakkuk 3:2), and in the Psalmist prayer for Israel, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in You." (Psalms 85:6). Remember, although billions of Gentiles will certainly be on earth during the Tribulation, this period of seven years is focused specifically on Israel and bringing their remnant back to God so they, as a nation, will finally see Jesus as the Messiah. As Gabriel told Daniel, this period of Israel's seventeenth week is, - "...decreed for your people [Daniel's people were Jews] and your holy city [the Jew's holy city was Jerusalem] to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness..." [the righteousness obtained when they come to Jesus]. That means the seven-year Tribulation is not focused on Gentiles, but is the "...time of trouble for

Jacob..." [Israel]. The time when most of Israel will be destroyed, but also a time when many "...will be saved out of it." (Jeremiah 30:7). Paul spoke of this when he said "...all Israel will be saved..." (Romans 11:25). This doesn't mean all Jews will be saved just because they're Jews. It means those who in the final time of destruction ("...until the full number of Gentiles has come in..." Romans 11:25), accept Christ and survive God's Tribulation will "...look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:10). In other words, during the Tribulation wrath a portion of Israel will suddenly recognize that Jesus is the Messiah! They will mourn for what their ancestors had done, but they, the remnant, will survive and "...gave glory to the God of heaven." (Revelation 11:13).

So what does all this have to do with the term "one-third" we see throughout this chapter? Simply, that's how many Jews will survive -- one-third -- and come to Jesus, "In the whole land," declares the Lord, 'two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will put into the fire; and I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on My name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, "The Lord is our God." (Zechariah 13:8-9). These are "all" of the Jews Paul talked about being saved. Not all of Israel, but all of the one-third who during the Tribulation accept Christ as the Messiah. It is these "...who can stand it...". It is this third who will, "...enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads..." (Isaiah 35:10). This is fulfillment of God's promise, "I will not completely destroy you..." (Jeremiah 30:11), but will instead preserve His remnant nation that He still loves.

The First Trumpet - 7. "The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down to earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up."

7.a. - "The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down to earth..."

This is a second hurling of fire. The first was the eighth angel with the censer who took fire from the altar and hurled it to earth (Revelation 8:5). Now a second angel, the first of seven, hurls fire that is mixed with hail and blood.

Let's explore the destructive elements:

The Hail --- This may represent tremendous storms that come with a cosmic impact of this magnitude, or maybe it's literally hail thrown from heaven as God did when He judged Egypt, "...at this time tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the day it was founded till now. Give an order to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every person and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die." (Exodus 9:18-19). God sent the hail but similar to what he is doing with the Trumpet angel He sent the judgment through His messenger Moses, - -- "When Moses stretched out his staff towards the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the earth. So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth." --- "The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were." (Exodus 9:23 and 26).

Sound familiar? Although not directly related, Egypt is symbolic of sin in the Bible. Here we see Moses in conflict with the Pharaoh, his idolatrous priests and his demonic magicians (a trinity of sorts), and through him God pours out great judgment, yet at the same time He protects Israel as His remnant. This also illustrates that God can obviously use every element of nature to enact His holy judgment.

The Blood -- This may be a natural phenomenon that occurs when aerial spores of microalgae called *Trentepohia Annulata* mix with atmospheric water vapor and cause rain to appear red -- called "Blood Rain". An event like this was cited centuries ago in Homer's *Iliad* and up through the 17th century was believed to be real blood. Now we know it is a microorganism that causes the red rain -- sort of like a "Red Tide" in the ocean. Or, it could be real blood that rains down as a component of God's judgment. Just as He turned the water to blood (real blood) in His judgment of Egypt (Exodus 7:20). It may also be mentioned here to indicate the human carnage that will surely accompany such an event.

The Fire - Peter's description of the Day of the Lord clearly indicates one of God's great destructive forces will be fire., "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly." --- "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything on it will be laid bare." (2 Peter 3: 7 and 10). - Clearly, Peter is speaking of the same events we now see. Although other destructive elements such as hail are mentioned, fire will play a key role as important component of God's destruction plan. In fact, the final destruction of all sinful men will come after the Millennium when the armies of Gog and Magog attack Jerusalem and are totally destroyed when, "...fire came down from heaven and devoured them." (Revelation 20:9).

Now let's see the outcome.

7.b. - "A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up."

In section 7.a. above we discussed how "...a third..." or "...one-third..." signifies God's mercy of partial destruction. I believe that's the message in this part of Revelation. It describes real destruction, but it gives a little more time for Israel's remnant to come to Jesus. Here we see one-third of vegetation destroyed:

- One-third of the earth's surface was burned up. Given that the earth's surface is roughly 196,900,000 square miles, this first blast would scorch about 65 million square miles of the world. That's equivalent to 16 times the size of the United States.
- One-third of the trees. It is estimated there are three-trillion trees on earth (3,000,000,000,000), which if that number were the same during the Tribulation means the fire would destroy about one-trillion trees.
- And all the green grass. - "...all...", means the world would be devoid of grass, leaving just dirt.

Combining the one-third of the earth, one-third of the trees and all of the grass gives us a view of this first blast judgment. In its wake is a scorched earth, with one-third of all life-given, oxygen producing vegetation burned up. Can you picture in your mind a blackened earth? What would it look like? What would it smell like? What would the quality of breathable air be with so much

smoke and soot? How much of the earth's oxygen – a portion of which comes from trees – will be depleted? And yet, this is just a warning.

- The Second Trumpet - 8. "The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9. a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed."

8.a. - 8. "The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea..."

Let's explore the destructive elements:

Recall from our studies in chapter 6, the sixth Seal points to the unbelievable destruction we now see happening in the seventh Seal: Revelation 6:13, "...and the stars in the sky fell to the earth..." Likewise, in His Olivet Discourse Jesus warns, - "...the stars will fall from the sky... (Matthew 24:29), and Luke paraphrased the same statement to say, - "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars..." - "...for the heavenly bodies will be shaken." (Luke 21:25-26 / see also Isaiah 34:4) - -- All of these speak to some type of great destructive event caused in part by heavenly bodies falling from the sky. Most conservative scholars believe, "...something like a mountain, all ablaze, ...", doesn't mean a literal mountain, but is instead "like" a mountain; a large cosmic body "...all ablaze...", falling to earth - like a comet. This could be the result of the great astronomical disturbance that occurs when "...the heavenly bodies will be shaken." (Matthew 24:29). It could also be the hand of God smiting the earth with His forces of destruction.

Now let's see the outcome.

8.b/9. "A third of the sea turned into blood, 9. a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed."

Similar to what we saw in the first Trumpet's destruction of the earth's surface, the second Trumpet now brings judgment on the earth's seas. Undoubtedly, whatever it is that falls ablaze from the sky will result in devastation to the world's oceans. Massive tidal waves would undoubtedly occur, but here in verse 8 our focus is drawn to the water itself and to the destructions of those in and on it.

The blood - Obviously God has the power to turn water into blood. We've already discussed that as one of the elements He used to punish Egypt. This is also mentioned by the Psalmist "He turned their waters into blood, causing their fish to die." (Psalms 105:29). This is probably the same phenomenon we see here. God will turn one-third of the oceans to blood. To get our heads around this, there is estimated to be 352 Quintillion gallons of water in the oceans. That is a number with 18 zeros - or, a billion times a billion. In other words, there would be about 100.2 trillion gallons of blood pouring into the sea.

The sea creatures -- Undoubtedly, as the Psalmist said, this would cause fish to die. But not only that, it would be one-third of all ocean dwelling creatures from the largest whale to the smallest microorganism; from the surface to the cold, black depths of the ocean's canyons. This is a number only God can count.--- Again, trying to get our head around what this means, picture the scorched and grassless earth with billions of stinking dead sea creatures washing up on every shore.

The ships -- Isn't it interesting that all the way into the seventh Seal man is still traveling, seeking commerce and militarily patrolling the seas. Jesus warns of this when He says "As it was in the days of Noah [sinful days], so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark." (Matthew 24:37-38). In other words, even though destruction was coming mankind continued to live like normal. Doing all the things they would normally do. That was a result of satan's influence on humanity who had convinced them their sinful and destructive life was normal. The same thing will be seen during the Tribulation. The antichrist will be in power and will command all politics, economics, military and religion, but we must also remember that man will be living at a time when sin runs unencumbered across the earth. Just as in the days before the flood there will be great "...wickedness of the human race had become on earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil at all times." (Genesis 6:5). Likewise, Jesus tells us about "...the increase in wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." (Matthew 24:12). Partly because God has sent them "...a powerful delusions..." (2 Thessalonians 2:11), but also because most of mankind at this point will be under the mark and control of satan, through the antichrist. Even during this time of severe judgment, sinful and delusioned man will be "...saying 'Peace and Safety'...", but "...destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

The Third Trumpet - 10. "The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11. the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter."

Let's explore the destructive elements:

Similar to the second Trumpet that releases a mountain-like flaming object crashing into the sea, now we have a "...great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky...". Refer again to section 8a above for more detail about what this object might be, but whatever it is it's large and massively destructive. Interestingly this object has a name - Wormwood, which is actually the name of a real perennial ornamental bush called "Artemisa-Absinthium". In the Greek it is called Apsinthos, and in Hebrew La'anah, which means "curse". The bush of this family contains a toxin named Thujone that can cause convulsions and death, which is reflective of what we see in its results.

The term is used several times in the Old and New Testament:

- Warning to Israel to ensure there is no root of gall or wormwood that will produce a spiritual poison. (Deuteronomy 29:18)
- Warning against the poison of sexual sin that is bitter and sharp as a double-edged sword, (Proverbs 5:4),
- Because of their idolatry the Lord will make Israel eat bitter food and drink poison water (Jeremiah 9:15 / 23:15),
- In Jeremiah's prayer God further curses Israel to drink of the bitter herb (Lamentations 3:15 and 19),
- Since Israel has not returned to God even her justice has turned bitter. (Amos 5:7)

Now let's see the outcome:

Do you see the pattern in the verses above? Disobedience to God's will brings judgment, and as referenced here this judgment can be a bitter pill. Early in Israel's history the people went through many cycles of obedience and disobedience, and at times God brought curses upon them that were symbolically as bitter and poisonous as wormwood. Now, in the Tribulation, God looks down upon His creation and sees unabated sin and the worship of the antichrist. Just as He did with ancient Israel God now brings an historic curse of wormwood on the earth. Obviously, whether it comes from a star, comet or some other object it results in wide-spread poisoning of a third of the earth's freshwater rivers and springs (sources of drinking water), and as a result many people die.

The Fourth Trumpet -- 12. The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night."

Let's explore these destructive elements:

Once again we're reminded of Jesus' comments in the Olivet Discourse and of events listed in chapter 6 as He alters the effects of the sun, moon and stars.

Now let's see the outcome:

The sun has not yet turned black like sackcloth, or the moon like blood (Revelation 6:12-14), but the cosmic bodies that bring light and warmth upon the earth have been altered -- sort of like a dimmer switch -- so that light and heat is removed from one-third of the day and one-third of the night. Roughly meaning eight hours of the night and day will be cast into darkness - and bring with it great fear as the world and universe begin to collapse around mankind. "People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world..." (Luke 21:25 / Exodus 10:21). But God will reverse this curse and with the fourth Bowl will turn the sun into a scorching inferno that will burn people like fire. Yet they will still refuse to turn to the Lord. (Revelation 16:8-9).

13. "As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: 'Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blast about to be sounded by the other three angels!'"

The King James version states, "...I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven...". The term used here for "angel" is derived from the Greek word "Aetou" which can also mean eagle. This gives us a picture of a powerful, stately bird used to describe this particular angel. I believe this refers to a special messenger from God like we see in Revelation 14:6, the proclaiming angel who is also "...flying in midair...". Interestingly, in 8:13 John says "...I heard..." the messenger but in 14:6 he said "...I saw...". In both cases he is recognizing an angel with something important to say, but their messages are very different. In 14:6 the angel is bringing "...the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth...". This is a near-final message of God's continuous offering of mercy and redemption. In contrast the messenger in 18:13 brings a dire warning -- a warning of woe. In this warning he makes a profound statement -- the judgment of the first seven Seals and three Trumpets --- false peace, war, famine, pestilence, death, vengeance and massive natural and cosmic destructions are nothing compared to what is about to come. The next three

Trumpet blasts will be even more powerful and destructive, but they will also release amongst men the unbridled power of satan's demons.

The Bible doesn't tell us how far apart the seven Trumpet judgments will be, but given the fact they, plus the seven Bowls, all occur in the last three and a half years, they must be rapid-fire, one right after the other with no time for man to rest. By this point in the seventh Seal the people of the whole world have been through war, famine, pestilence, death, demonic control of government and economics, state sanctioned martyrdom, astronomical events we can barely imagine, and across the earth hundreds-of-millions will have died. The land is scorched, a third of earth's foliage is gone, a third of the oceans have been turned to blood, a third of the sea life is dead, and a third of the earth's drinking water has been turned to poison. But after all of this, and in parallel with extended mercy, God sends a message that suffering and destruction will now intensify as the next three judgment Trumpets are blown.

Woe to man who will not turn to God.

LESSON 47

Revelation chapter 9, verses 1-12

Quick Recap:

The seventh and final Seal is now open. Its opening was preceded by an angel who took fire from God's holy altar, put it in his censer and hurled it to earth. This released the first of seven angels who with their Trumpets will blast the earth with even greater destruction than anything that has ever been seen before.

- The first angel blew his Trumpet sending fire, hail and blood upon the earth. This scorched the entire earth's surface, killing one third of the trees and all of the grass.
- The second angel then blew his Trumpet and a blazing mountain-sized object fell into the ocean. This turned a third of the sea to blood, killing a third of the inhabitants in its depths and a third of the ships on its surface.
- The third angel blew his Trumpet and another blazing object - a great star named Wormwood (meaning bitter – Proverbs 5:4) - fell into the rivers and poisoned a third of the earth's fresh water.
- The fourth angel blew his Trumpet and God caused a third of the sun, moon and stars to go dark for a third of the day and a third of the night. This will undoubtedly throw the punished world into even greater fear.

With these four Trumpet blasts the pure wrath of God will come upon the earth's surface, its oceans, its fresh water, and the universe. But as devastating as these will be there is more to come that is immeasurably worst. After the fourth Trumpet another angel, called the eagle - to signify his powerful message - alerted the whole world to the fact the first four Trumpet judgments were nothing compared to what they are about to see. --- He cried a warning, Woe! Woe! Woe! to the unrepentant people of earth.

Revelation 9:1-12

9:1 - "The fifth angel sounded his Trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. 2. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. 3. And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. 4. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant of tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5. They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes. 6. During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. 7. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. 8. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. 10. They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. 11. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer). 12. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come."

9:1 - "The fifth angel sounded his Trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss."

1.a. - "The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth."

The Star - John heard the Trumpet and saw a star, but this is a star unlike any we have seen before. By this point in the Tribulation several "stars" and other heavenly bodies will have fallen to earth as part of God's judgment, but this one is somehow different. In verse 2 John calls the star "he", and here in verse 1 "he" is given a specific task to accomplish. Obviously, this is not a star in the astronomical sense, but is instead a living being -- but who?

The Fall - Notice the qualifier in John's statement "...a star that had fallen...". The use of the word "had" is spoken in the past tense, which means whoever "he" is had already fallen to earth prior to the time John sees him. The prophet Isaiah gives us some insight into who this fallen star might be, "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit." (Isaiah 14:12-15).

At some point in the Biblical past the angel lucifer (in Hebrew, hehel-ben, the "shining one", or "son of morning". In Greek, the "dawn bringer", or "morning star". In Latin, lucifer the "light bringer" had a desire to be like God, but his desire for prominence made him the enemy of God. As a result, he was driven out of heaven and became who we recognize as satan, the devil, or as he is called in Revelation, the dragon (Revelation 12:9). It was he who led man into temptation's fall and brought sin upon the earth, and it is he who during the Tribulation will continue to pursue his original desire to make himself God. Jesus spoke of his fall in Luke 10:18 when He told the seventy-two disciples, "I saw satan fall like lightening from heaven." When this happened he took disobedient angels with him who became his demons. But even though satan was cast out of heaven it appears he, and probably his demons as well, still have access to heaven and even to the throne room of God. In Job 1:6-7 we see satan standing before God. "One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and satan also came with them." (Job 1:6-7 / 2:1). He was there to report on his activities of "...roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." This indicates his presence before the throne was after his banishment from heaven to earth. Yet, he was still allowed to enter heaven. Peter spoke of satan's earthly presence when he warned us to, "Be alert and of sober mind". Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8). Based on this it appears satan is currently free to roam the earth and visit heaven as well, but his heavenly visitation privileges are temporary. In Revelation 12 we will see the Archangel Michael in battle with satan and his demonic forces. A battle that takes place in heaven. A battle that ends with satan being permanently banished to earth. "Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down -- the ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him." --- "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." (Revelation 12:7-9 and part of verse 12). This seems to indicate several things:

satan "...fought back...", which is defensive, and may indicate Michael initiated the attack to banish satan. --- But why? We really don't know and commentators differ on the matter. Maybe it's when his antichrist came on the scene? Maybe it's when the antichrist declared himself to be God? Maybe it was in preparation for opening the Abyss of hell? We don't know why, but at some time in the future he will be forcibly removed from heaven - never to return. This verse also verified he has his own army of angels who were finally hurled to earth with him. When this happens satan and his demons will have been cast to earth a second time, and have "...lost their place...". In doing so his access to heaven is over, he will then be fully on earth and will bring his sinful fury on all. But he has limited time before he too will come under the wrath of God.

1.b. - "The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss."

The Key -- Recall in Revelation 1:18 Jesus told John, "...and I hold the keys to death and Hades!". Presumably it is these keys (this authority) given to satan to unlock the unholy lair of his most fearful demons. Later, in chapter 20 we will see another angel "...coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil, or satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him in the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him..." (Revelation 20:1-3). The key given to satan and later given to the angel will unlock and relock a very dreadful place.

The Abyss - In Greek the term used for Abyss is defined as a bottomless pit. It is a translation of the original Hebrew word "tehom" which loosely means like a deep flood. It is also associated with the Hebrew term "sheol" which means abode of the dead or realm of rebellious spirits. Given those definitions it must be a place of unspeakable suffering, even for demons. When Jesus confronted the demon "legion" at Gerasenes, "...they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss." (Luke 8:31). Obviously, the Abyss is a place of great evil where demons are incarcerated and where satan will be sent during the thousand year Millennial Kingdom. It is mentioned eight times in the book of Revelation and in each case describes a place where demons are kept prior to their final sentencing to hell forever (Revelation 20:10). Jesus talks about this in His story of sheep and goats (separating believers from unbelievers). There He says to the unredeemed, "...Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41). This is a place like hell, with "...shame and everlasting contempt..." (Daniel 12:2), and a place where "...the fire is not quenched..." (Isaiah 66:24 / Mark 9:48). Peter speaks of this prison of angels when he says, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment..." (2 Peter 2:4). So too Jude paints a picture of what is in store for satan's accomplices, "And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling - these He has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains of judgment on the great Day." (Jude 6/7). So the Abyss is a holding place. A prison of sorts where God has cast demons to hold them until being thrown into hell, or, as we see here, being thrown on mankind.

Now we see something that is truly difficult to get our head around. Jesus has given satan the keys to a place where the most evil of evil resides. And he is about to open it and release them on earth.

2. "When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky darkened by the smoke from the Abyss."

satan will take the key given to him by Jesus, and open the prison of hell. And when he does he releases something so terrifying it is difficult for John to put in words. Once the Abyss is open the

most heinous of incarcerated demons are released - apparently, by the millions. A number so large they appear to be like smoke from a massive furnace. Not like smoke from a fire, but from a furnace which not only generates smoke, but does so under extreme pressure and great heat. The smoke doesn't simply rise from the fire, but is instead blasted like a great explosion to spread its demonic soot upon the earth. A smoke so thick it temporarily blots out the sun and the sky.

3. "And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth."

But the smoke wasn't smoke at all. On closer examination, what John described as smoke is instead a massive, earth-covering swarm of hell's demons. The demons who had been incarcerated in the Abyss for generations, and who are now let loose in a hoard described in the only way John knows how -- as a swarm of locusts. Locusts are large insects like a grasshopper who have a "swarming phase" in their short cycle of life. When that happens the normally solitary insects gather into swarms of millions and migrate in-mass destroying all vegetation in their path. God used a swarm of locust like this to punish Egypt, "...I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians..." (Exodus 10:4-6). --- So picture that type of devastating swarm. So thick it covers the ground and destroys everything in its path. But this swarm is not insects, but demons. Demons released from the pits of hell who will come down on the earth for one reason. To torment man.

And they "...were given power like that of scorpions of the earth." -- Again, John describes the power of the demons "like" the power of a scorpion. A scorpion is an arachnid, and related to spiders. Their key characteristic is a large forward-facing venomous stinger. About 25 sub-species on earth have venom toxic enough to kill humans. In severe cases the venom can generate cardiovascular failure or neuromuscular damage including excruciating pain and paralysis. People stung by scorpions have been known to roll on the ground, gashing their teeth in searing pain, with difficulty breathing, muscles thrashing, drooling and vomiting. Obviously, John's description of a thick smoke of swarming locusts-scorpions is fitting, but the reality of what the swam of demons will do is far more destructive.

4. "They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant of tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads."

4.a. - "They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant of tree...". The first Trumpet blast has already resulted in great destruction of the earth's foliage (Revelation 8:7), but more likely verse 4 tells us the demons will not waste their time trying to destroy the earth. Instead, they are focused on the earth's unrepentant inhabitants.

4.b. - "...but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads."

Recall, the 144,000 evangelists were marked with a seal, the name of God written on their foreheads (Revelation 7:3 / 14:1). This not only identified them as followers of Jesus but also made them indestructible. But who else might be "marked" as followers of the Lord during this time? The Bible doesn't say specifically in Revelation, but it does give us some pointers to consider:

- In 2 Timothy 2:19 Paul told Timothy "The Lord knows who are His..." (See also Numbers 16:5)
- To the faithful church at Philadelphia Jesus said, "I will also write on them my new name." (Revelation 3:12)
- After the Millennial Kingdom and final judgment God will create a new heaven and earth. There the inhabitants (us) "...will see His face and their names will be on His forehead (Revelation 22:4)
- And when God judged the disobedient Israel He said, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over the detestable things that are done in it." (Ezekiel 9:4).

Given this, it certainly seems God "marks" -- and certainly knows -- everyone who has put their faith in Christ. They, like the 144,000 may also be protected from the locust swarm.

5. "They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes."

5.a. - "They were not allowed to kill them..."

Interesting. We don't typically think of demons being allowed to kill humans, but maybe they are. Here they are told they cannot.

5.b. - "...but only to torture them for five months..."

Five months is the average lifespan of a locust. In the big picture this seems like a fairly short span of time, but just think how long it would seem if demons by the millions covered the earth and tormented mankind day and night.

5.c. - "...And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes."

John repeats this three times – Revelation 9:3 / 9:5 / 9:10 . Obviously, he is emphasizing the suffering and pain mankind will receive by the venomous power of these demons.

6. "During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them."

This verse gives indication of man's emotional state during these times of great destruction. At the opening of the sixth Seal man prayed to the earth to "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Revelation 6:16). But that was nothing compared to the wrath they are experiencing now. Month after month mankind is violently attacked by demons from hell. Demons who had been locked away for centuries in torment but who have now been released and allowed to vent their sinful anger on man. At this point man will 'seek' death. They will pursue death and "...will long to die...", possibly trying every imaginable method of bringing death on themselves, but God will not allow them to die. In doing so He makes them face destruction, but...He also gives them five more months of mercy to turn to Him.

7. "The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. 8. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. 10. They

had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months."

Here John takes time to provide more detail about what these demons look like and what they will do. He does so to ensure we get a clear picture of what lies ahead for those who reject Christ, reject His Tribulational grace, and now must endure punishment beyond belief.

7.a. - "The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. The first four judgment seals gave us a picture of "forces" in the symbolism of horses. Here again, John uses the same imagery to describe these demons. Like a horse, they will be powerful, fast, strong and prepared for harsh battle.

7.b. - "On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold...,"

These were not crowns, but "...something like a crown...". Some type of head covering. Maybe a helmet? The Greek word is "stephanoi" that means like a garland. Not a crown like a king but a crown like a garland-wreath won in competition. As if they already know they will be the victorious over man in the contest ahead. It may also be another way to describe the head of the demon. A warrior's head that resembles a crown.

7.c. - "...and their faces resembled human faces."

I think that lets us know they look like humans and not like insects. It may also indicate they are rational, thinking and intelligent beings.

8.a. - "Their hair was like women's hair...,"

It's unclear what this means. Maybe their hair is long? Maybe it is beautiful? Maybe it lures men?

8.b. - "... and their teeth were like lions' teeth."

But they are deadly and their attacks will be vicious.

9.a. - "They had breastplates like breastplates of iron..."

They are prepared and protected for severe battle.

9.b. - "...and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle."

In preparation for Israel's battle against the Medes Jeremiah prophesied they should "...send up horses like a swarm of locusts..." (Jeremiah 51:27). In the ancient world horses drawing a chariot was a dreaded war machine. They were fast, and often carried soldiers armed with pikes and bows. Even their wheels were sometimes armored with blades as a whirling and cutting vehicle of death as they plowed their way through the opposing army. John's description here is to further help us picture in our minds the vicious appearance of Satan's demonic army. They have wings, so we know they fly, and their wings in the concert of a swarm would sound like masses of thundering teams of horses and chariots as they came rushing to battle.

10. - "They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months."

For the third time John emphasizes their scorpion-like sting that will torment mankind around the world for five long months.

11. "They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer)."

There are numerous thoughts about what this verse means. Proverbs 30:27 references the fact that locusts "...have no king, yet they advance together in ranks." But these demons who swarm and attack like locusts have a leader. His name is Abaddon in Hebrew (Aramaic) and Appollyon in Greek. In both cases he is known as the destroyer - whom the King James Version calls "...the angel of the bottomless pit...". An angel evil beyond our understanding. Entrusted by satan to lead his demonic army of millions.

12. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

Imagine the thought of having gone through the fifth Trumpet and knowing there are two more to go. Like many passages in Revelation we cannot be too dogmatic about the meaning of specific verses. Chapter 9 can be confusing, but here we have tried to explain scripture with scripture to give us an understanding. At this point in the Tribulation timeline God's wrath is in full force, yet even within the fifth Trumpet God again provides a window of mercy for five more months.

LESSON 48

Quick Recap:

By this point in the Tribulation five out of seven Trumpet judgments will have blasted upon the earth with each adding layer upon layer of world-wide destruction:

- Hail, fire and blood fell upon the earth scorching the entire surface and killing one third of the trees and all of the grass.
- A blazing mountain-sized object fell into the ocean turning a third of the sea to blood, killing a third of the inhabitants in its depths and a third of the ships on its surface.
- Another blazing object - a star named Wormwood - fell into the rivers and poisoned a third of the earth's fresh water supply.
- God then caused a third of the sun, moon and stars to go dark for a third of the day and a third of the night.
- Satan is then given the key to the abyss and when it is opened a locust-swarm of hellish demons are released to torture mankind for five months. This last action is the first of three judgment woes.

We are now deep into the Day of the Lord when God's wrath comes upon His creation like never before. After the fifth judgment most of the earth's surface has been scorched. A third of the oxygen-giving trees and all of the grass is gone. The whole earth is burned, blackened and crusted, and undoubtedly smoke, soot and foul air cover everything and everyone. A third of the ocean's sea water has turned to blood resulting in billions of dead sea creatures littering its surface and beaches with the stench of rotten fish. A third of the world's fresh water supply is poisoned, killing all who drink it, and for a third of each day and a third of each night the sun, moon and stars are darkened. And if these natural destructions were not enough, God then allows Satan to release a locust-swarm of demons upon earth with the sole intent of tormenting mankind for five long months.

But despite all this we still see God's mercy as He takes His time to throw judgment and destruction at the world. Rather than destroying everyone and everything in a swift moment of wrath His deliberate judgment steps provide more time for the gospel to spread to everyone who will come to Him for redemption.

This is how the world will be as the sixth angel prepares to blow his Trumpet blast.

Revelation 9:13-21

9:13 - "The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. 14. It said to the sixth angel who had a trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15. And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. 16. The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number. 17. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. 18. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of their mouths. 19. The power of the

horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. 20. The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts."

9:13 - "The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God."

At the opening of the third Seal John "...heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures...", and listened as it described the famine judgment to come (Revelation 6:6). He also heard "...in a voice like thunder..." each time one of the four living creatures announced the next seal (Revelation 6:1). At the fifth Seal John heard the "...loud voice..." of the martyrs under the altar as they cried-out for God's vengeance (Revelation 6:10). He then heard the multitudes in white robes as they sang praises to God in front of His throne (Revelation 7:10). No doubt John hears lots of voices in heaven.

Now, at the blasting of the sixth Trumpet John hears another voice, a voice of command that comes from the horns of the golden altar. This is the altar from which the eighth angel took the fire to hurl to earth and release the first trumpet (Revelation 8:5).

Recall there were two altars in the Tabernacle which are modeled on two altars in heaven. An altar of bronze on which the sacrifice was made as an offering to God, and a second altar of gold for burning incense and offering man's prayers for mercy and redemption. The altar of bronze was called the Altar of Burnt Offering which was made of wood covered in bronze. This may be represented by the altar we see the martyr's under at the fifth Seal. These are those who "...had been slain...", as would be the sacrificial burnt offering in the temple (Revelation 6:9). God instructed the priests to "Build an altar of acacia wood, three cubits high; it is to be square, five cubits long and five wide. Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze." (Exodus 27:1-2 - note: a cubit is about 18"). The second altar, the golden Altar of Incense sat directly in front of the vail in the Tabernacle. It was here the priest would burn incense twice a day as a prayer offering to God for mercy. God's instructions were to, "Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high - its horns of one piece with it. Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns in pure gold..." "...Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony [the Holy of Holies] - before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony - where I will meet with you. Aaron must burn the fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for the generations to come." "...Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on its horns." (Exodus 30:1-3 / 6-8 and 10). - It was on this altar the priest burned the incense of man's prayers for mercy, "May my prayers be set before you like incense; may the lifting of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." (Psalms 141:2).

The horns on both altars were projections that stuck out from each corner. When a sacrifice was made the priest would, "Take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar." (Exodus 29:12). This applied to both the Altar of Burnt Offering and to "...the horns of the Altar of Fragrant Incense that is before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting." [Tabernacle] (Exodus 30:1 / Leviticus 4:7). The Bible is not clear why

there are four horns or what other purpose they serve. Maybe they are decorative, or as a way to help move these heavy objects, or maybe as a special place to put the special blood? But it's clear the Altar of Incense was also viewed as a place of mercy and forgiveness. We see this when Adonijah (who had wrongly made himself king) heard that Solomon had officially been made king. He feared for his life, went to the temple "...and took hold of the horns of the altar..." to beg for mercy. So too, when Joab - Abonijah's conspirator - heard what had happened he too fled to the temple and "...took hold of the horns...". (I Kings 1:50 / 2:28). Obviously both men saw the altar and its horns as a place of refuge where they hoped to be under the protection of God. Their cries would have been the voices of those seeking refuge from certain destruction. So here, the voice John hears may be the martyr's under the altar as they cried out for vengeance (Revelation 6:9), or the voice may be that of Jesus as He announces the coming destruction. The Bible doesn't tell us who the voice is but whatever the source this is not the last time we will hear it. At the end of the third Bowl judgment we will hear the altar respond, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments." (Revelation 16:7). Not only does the voice release the angel in chapter 9 for God's wrath, but it reaffirms the holy justification of God's wrath in chapter 16.

14. "It said to the sixth angel who had a trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.'"

14.a. - "...Release the four angels who are bound..."

The altar speaks and commands the angel to release the "...four angels who are bound...". Obviously God would not bind (capture and restrain) His obedient angels in heaven, so these must be another group of angels who were struck down with satan and have been bound for centuries waiting for this specific assignment. Previously, we studied how satan will release millions of demons from the Abyss to torment man (Revelation 9:2-6). We also know that Peter spoke of angels who had been put in chains (2 Peter 2:4), as did Jude (Jude 6/7). From this, and the command to "...release them..." I believe we can assume this is speaking of four fallen-angels who God has held in reserve for this specific task.

14.b. - "...at the great river Euphrates."

So why are they bound at the River Euphrates? To give us some context let's review where the river is and the role it plays throughout God's plan.

- At 1,700 miles in length, the Euphrates is the longest river in Western Asia. Its source is in the mountains of Turkey from where it travels through modern day Syria and Iraq to empty in the Persian Gulf. Along with the Tigris, the two rivers bounded the land of Mesopotamia - "The Land Between the Rivers."
- It was one of four rivers - Euphrates, Tigris, Pishon and Gihon (the Pishon and Gihon are now gone) - that ran through the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10-14). As such, it was part of the perfect land where Adam and Eve lived.
- It is the region, at Ur, from which God called Abram to a land in Canaan.
- It is the north/eastern boundary of The Promised Land [Israel] given to Abraham, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18). This was a covenant promise between God and Abraham, and as such, it remains to this day the boundary of the promised land God gave to Israel.
- It is listed as a region of king David's great victories against Israel's enemies. (2 Samuel 8:3-4)
- But, through man's fall it became the epicenter of sinful activity on earth.
- It was in this area that satan first tempted man to sin. (Genesis 3).

- It was here the first murder was committed and man chose between two spiritual routes - the obedient way of Abel-Seth and the disobedient way of Cain (Genesis 4).
- It was here man turned against God and tried to make a tower at Babel so they could "...make a name for themselves...", rather than bowing before His holy Name. As a result God scattered mankind - and his sin - across the world (Genesis 11).
- But the area became the homeland of Israel's greatest enemies - amongst these, the Assyrians, Medo-Persians and Babylonians. Conflicts that still exist to this day. (Ezra 4:9-10).
- It was the land to which Israel was exiled by the Assyrians (ca 720 BC) and by the Babylonians (ca 605 to 586 BC). The time in which Daniel was given the end-times vision of the seventieth week (Daniel 9:27).
- It is the place from which God will release the four fallen-angels who will command a massive demon army.
- It is here, when God dries up the river that the massive armies of man will gather "...for the battle on the great day of God Almighty..." "...to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (Revelation 16:14&16).
- It is the place from which the antichrist's evil empire gets its name "Mystery Babylon the Great - The Mother of Prostitutes." (Revelation 17:5).

The Euphrates flowed through and nourished the perfect garden. Without sin Eden would have encompassed the whole world. A land of milk and honey, a place where God's people could flourish. But the garden became the birthplace of sin, and after the fall it became the hot-bed of demonic activity for satan that continues to this day. Given this, there is no more appropriate place for God to restrain four demons who will be let loose to destroy those who have turned the land from a perfect garden to literally hell on earth.

15. "And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind."

15.a. - "And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year..."

And now God tells us why the demonic angels were held in bondage. They had been "...kept ready..." for a specific moment in time to spread their wrath upon man. The Bible tells us that no one knows "...the times or dates..." of God's end-times events (Acts 1:7). Jesus reaffirmed that no one "...knows about that day or hour..." (Matthew 24:36). But in this verse the mention of a specific "...hour and day and month and year...", can assure us that God has a set timeline, right down to the very minute, when elements of His plan will be revealed. This exactness of God's plan is why we must be encouraged by the end-times narrative -- because it is further affirmation that God is in total control of all things.

15.b. - "...were released to kill a third of mankind."

Earlier in this chapter we were told the swarm of locust-like demons were released to torment man for five months but "...were not given power to kill them..." (Rev 9:5). But God did not put the same restrictions on these demons. In fact, they will be released specifically "...to kill..." one third of mankind. In the fourth Seal we saw the pale death horseman arise and with war, famine, sword, plague and wild beasts he killed "...over a fourth..." of the earth's population. If you look at that as 25% of today's demographics that would be almost 2 billion people. Add to that those who will be killed by the scorched earth, blooded ocean, poisoned rivers and other destructions. Through all of

this the population of the earth is quickly dwindling. And now, these four fallen-angels have been given power - by God - to kill another third of remaining mankind.

16 & 17. 16. "The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand [200 million]. I heard their number. 17. "The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this:..." Let's look at 16 and part of 17 together. John now sees how the demon-angels will destroy a third of mankind. They will lead an army of 200 million mounted demons. Some commentators try to rationalize this army as:

- (1) China - The Bible doesn't even say China will still exist at this time, but even if it does, God does not need to use an earthly nation to form His army of wrath. Additionally, an army of humans would not be able to move quickly enough across the earth to kill billions of people. It could be China, but we can't assume that.
- (2) Others try to combine this with the descriptions in verses 17 and 18 to rationalize some type of massive, heavily armed modern fighting force.
- (3) Still others try to align this army with the Armageddon gathering of "...kings from the east..." (Revelation 16:12), but that army is part of the seventh Trumpet that has not yet been blown.

Most conservative scholars view this army as simply a massive demon hoard led by four powerful demonic angels who were bound by God for this task. As we have already seen early in this chapter millions of demons will have been released to torment man. Now we see another force who will be given the task to kill another third of mankind. --- But...again we see God's mercy. He could have killed 100% but again it is only another third. The remaining two thirds are left to hear the proclaimed gospel of Christ.

17.a. - "Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur."

Let's break this down:

- "Their breastplates were..." -- They are heavily armored. Exactly how we don't know, but they are a powerful and formidable army.
- "... fiery red,..." - KJV - "fire". - as we've seen and discussed fire will play a huge role in God's judgment events.
- "... dark blue..." - KJV - "jacinth" -- The King James uses the term "jacinth", which is a dark stone. It is mentioned in Exodus 28:19 as one of the twelve stones in the breastplate, (in Hebrew "Hosen"), worn by the high priest. Sometimes called the "breastplate of judgment" with one stone for each of the twelve tribes, it also held the Urim and Thummim (Hebrew for "uncertain" or maybe "lights and perfection" - "revelation and truth") that was placed over the heart of the priest whenever he entered the Holy Place in the Tabernacle. They were used in the Old Testament to determine the will of God when making decisions (Exodus 28:6-30). In verse 18 we see three plagues upon man.
- The second one, smoke, is represented by this dark stone, which would be the "...dark blue...".
- "The third "...and yellow as sulfur [KJV Brimstone)..." - The word Brimstone (burning sulfur) is often used in the Bible to describe the torment of hell. It was rained down from heaven to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24) and is used to signify judgment and destruction in Isaiah 30:33, 34:9, Ezekiel 38:22, Psalms 11:6, just to name a few . It will be a key element in God's final destruction as well when, "...the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur..." [KJV Brimstone] (Revelation 20:10).

- " ...The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions,..."

Peter describes satan as a roaring and devouring lion (I Peter 5:8). The reference here is not only links these creatures to their demonic leader, but gives us the image of a large, powerful, biting and killing attacker.

17.b. and 18 - "... and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur." 18. "A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of their mouths."

As discussed above, now we see the source of the army's destructive power. Their very breath will bring burning fire, choking smoke and melting sulfur to destroy one-third of remaining mankind.

19. "The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury."

Verse 18 indicates their fiery breath is the source of their killing power, but their tails, representative of satan, are much like the sting of the locusts-demon (Revelation 9:5) and are meant to "inflict" great injury.

20. "The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts."

How sad. By this time the remnant of man still on earth will have suffered untold anguish and pain over the last several years. We know from chapter 6 that after the sixth Seal man knew exactly who was the source of their torment, "They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Revelation 6:16). They had also heard the gospel spoken by the 144,000, the Two Witnesses and by the testimony of the Tribulation saints, but they still will not turn to God. They continue in idolatry through the religion of the antichrist and the false-prophet, and they are so sinful they continue in their sin and refuse to accept the one thing God continues to offer...

His mercy.

LESSON 49

Revelation, chapter 10 verses 1-11

Quick Recap:

The primary focus of chapter 6 was to describe the first six judgment Seals: False peace, War, Famine, Death, Prayers for vengeance and the beginning of judgment on the entire universe. But after the sixth Seal God abruptly changed the focus from judgment to mercy. He does this through chapter 7, which provides a pause; a resting place in the narrative that shifts our view from that of destruction to one of redemptive grace. Through His 144,000 converted Jewish evangelists, the martyr's testimony, Two Witnesses and a proclaiming angel, the gospel is spread throughout the world and "...a great multitude that no one could count..." will be saved (Revelation 7:9). Then chapter 8 resumes the description of God's judgment and takes us through the opening of the dreaded seventh Seal and the blasting destruction of the first six of seven trumpet judgments.

These:

- (1) Scorch the earth and one third of its vegetation,
- (2) Turn one third of the oceans to blood, killing billions of its sea creatures,
- (3) Turn one third of the earth's fresh water supply to poison, killing all who drink it,
- (4) Dim the light from the sun, moon and stars for one third of each day and night,
- (5) Allow satan to release millions of demons like swarms of locusts to torment man for five months,
- (6) And release four demon angels bound for untold centuries at the birthplace of sin for them to command an army of two hundred million of hell's soldiers who destroy one third of the remaining population.

And then, just before the blasting of the seventh and final Trumpet God provides another pause in the narrative. As with the pause between the sixth and seventh Seals this pause provides a break in the story between the sixth and seventh Trumpets, and like before, God will allow the reader to momentarily step-away from the descriptions of mass destruction to again see His gift of mercy and redemption for mankind. This intermission will take us through chapter 10 and most of chapter 11 before the seventh Trumpet is finally blown.

Now within that context let's look at Revelation, chapter 10 verses 1-11

1. "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. 2. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 3. and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. 4. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down." 5. Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. 6. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! 7. But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." 8. Then the

voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." 9. So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." 10. I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. 11. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about [KJV before] many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

As we have already seen, the entire book of Revelation uses imagery to tell its story. This helps readers across centuries and cultures better understand what it means. For example, in chapter 6 we discussed the four "horses" who bring the first four Seal judgments. But as we learned, they will not be actual horses. Instead, use of the word "horse" helps the reader picture in his/her mind the idea of strength, power, speed and even destructive force. We saw the same thing with the description of locusts, scorpions and mounted troops in chapter 9. In all of these cases the imagery helps form a vivid picture in our mind that is required for a deeper understanding of the text. Now in chapter 10 we see a lot of imagery that will help us form the right picture and context in our minds so we can better understand the complex events John is describing. As a result of its imagery, the interpretation of chapter 10 is hotly debated amongst well-known Revelation commentators. Because of this I will try to provide a balanced view of various opinions where necessary. You can then study and pray over them to see where your heart lands.

1. "Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars." There are two primary views of who the "mighty angel" is. Some believe he is actually a powerful angel sent as a messenger for Jesus. Others contend he is Jesus Himself. We could spend hours on this one verse debating the pros and cons of each view, but for now let's hit the high spots.

Viewed as an angel:

- We've already met lots of angels in Revelation who play amazing roles. In an earlier lesson, I provided a list of angels who testify, circle God's throne, seek the Scroll Opener, announce judgments, hold back the wind, throw censors, blast trumpets, control fire, pour Bowls, reap the earth, proclaim the gospel and bind satan in the Abyss. Clearly, angels are used in Revelation to carry out some pretty unique and amazing tasks for God. Given that, the actions of this angel would not be out of character.
- We met a similar "mighty angel" (KJV "strong angel") in chapter 5. The one who proclaimed "...in a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?'" Obviously, this "mighty angel" was given a critical task to search heaven and earth for the worthy Scroll Opener, who as we saw is Jesus. In the context of chapter 5 it would seem Jesus and this mighty angel could not be the same person. Jesus is described as the one the angel is looking for, the "...Lamb, looking as if it had been slain..." (Revelation 1:1-6). So if Jesus is the person the mighty angel is seeking, and since He is described separately when He is found, then it would appear the mighty angel and Jesus could not be the same person. This would mean the mighty angel in chapter 5 is just that - an angel.
- The Greek word "allon" is used in this verse for "...another..." and is generally interpreted to mean "another of the same kind". In other words, the same kind of angel as previously described. That would mean the angel in chapter 10 is the same type of angels we saw in chapters 8 and 9. One of these was also described as "...another angel..." (8:3) who announces

the coming of the seven Trumpet angels by making an offering of incense to God and then throwing the censor to earth. It would then seem logical that the angel in chapter 10 who comes after these angels in chapters 8 and 9 is in fact "another" [allon] angel just like these. It also makes sense that Jesus would not be titled the same way as "another of the same kind" because even if He was described as an "angel" He would not be viewed as one of the same kind.

- Some believe the rainbow above his head is a sign of coming judgment. A reminder that God once destroyed the world by flood and will now destroy it by fire (2 Peter 3:7). Others take a slightly different tact and believe the rainbow is a sign of God's first covenant promise with man as a sign of mercy (Genesis 9:13). Still others believe the rainbow gives us a picture of God's throne room like we saw in chapter 4; which is similar to what Ezekiel saw in his vision of heaven (Ezekiel 1:28). All of these examples are true so I think it's safe to assume the rainbow is a symbol of God's glory, judgment and promises, and in that sense it could be associated with either Jesus or a heavenly messenger.
- Another supporting view of this messenger as an angel is the fact Revelation is a revealing both from Christ and about Christ. Specifically His role as Judge and King. There are over 60 titles of Jesus in Revelation and all of them provide some type of description about Him. For example: He is, the Faithful Witness (1:5), the Alpha and Omega (1:8), the Living One (1:18), "...Him who has the sharp, double edged sword..." (2:12), He who searches hearts and minds (2:23), "...a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain..." (5:6), and a Rider Faithful and True, who judges and makes war (19:11). To call Jesus an angel rather than using a more descriptive view would seem to be out of context.
- The verse says the angel is "...coming down from heaven..." to plant His feet on earth. This seems to conflict with Jesus coming to earth and standing on Mt. Zion (14:1), and as the "...faithful and true...rider coming to destroy mankind. It would not seem likely that Jesus would have another coming, prior to His Second Coming, where He would plant His feet on earth.

Viewed as Christ:

- Daniel had a vision similar to that of the mighty angel. In his case it was a "...man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like topaz, his face like lightening, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude" (Daniel 10:5-7). Obviously, this view is very similar to the Revelation description of Jesus who was "...dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters (Revelation 1:13-15). This is Jesus revealed in His role as the Holy Judge. Daniel's reaction to seeing Him this way is almost identical to John's reaction when he saw Jesus. Daniel said "...as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground." (Daniel 10:9), and John confessed, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17). --- In other words, they both fainted.
- Some commentators cite a statement in 11:3 as another indication this may be Jesus. In that verse the person talking to John says, "I will appoint my two witnesses...". In verse 1 of chapter 11 John says "I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told...". Since chapter 11 follows immediately after chapter 10 -- which ends with a verse including "...I was told..." -- we could assume the person speaking to John in chapter 10 is the same person speaking to John in chapter 11. If that's true, then the comment "I will appoint my..." seems to indicate Jesus because it would seem unlikely an angel would claim the witnesses as his.

- There are other verses in the Bible where the preincarnate Christ seems to appear as an angel:
 - The angel who spoke to Hagar at the spring and said "I will increase your descendants..." (Genesis 16:6-9),
 - The angel who stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac and said, "...I swear by myself, declares the Lord..." (Genesis 22:15),
 - The angel who said "I am the God of Bethel...." (Genesis 31:13),
 - The angel who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and said "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..." (Exodus 3:6),
 - Christ is also described in other scripture using similar terms as those in chapter 10,
 - "The Lord wraps himself in light..." "...he makes the clouds his chariot..." (Psalms 104:2-3),
 - "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence." (Daniel 7:13),
 - "...his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance..." (Revelation 1:16).

Like I said earlier, we could spend considerable time debating whether this person is an angel with a message from God, or Jesus bringing the message Himself. Either way, it is a beautiful view of the power of Holy Jesus descending upon the earth as He begins to take His rightful place as its Creator and Ruler. The comparisons above are just a sampling of these two primary views. As we work through this chapter we will discuss more.

2. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land...",

2.a. - "...little scroll..." - There is also debate about what the mighty angel is holding. Some contend it is the same scroll Jesus held as He broke the seven seals and released God's judgment (Revelation 5:1 / 6:1). That said, it may not be this scroll because it has not fulfilled its purpose at this point. There are still one more Trumpet and seven Bowls to release, so allowing John to take it now (10:10) would seem unlikely. Others believe it is another scroll entirely - a "little" one - (which may mean a shorter message), possibly used to bring the message of the gospel John and others will be asked to spread (10:11 / 11:3 / 14:6). Either way, John says it is "...open...", so whatever it contains has either already been revealed or is now being revealed. That means it could be the original scroll (chapter 5) which is now open because all seven seals have been broken, or a new scroll with a new message that is open and ready to reveal its message from God.

2.b. - "He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land..."

Whether this person is an angel or Jesus his/His action seems to indicate supreme ownership. The surface of the earth is either land or sea, so placing a foot on each clearly illustrates control of both. The symbolism is clear - Jesus is returning as the Sovereign and Holy King, and when He does, He will retake from satan what is rightfully His.

3. "...and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion". When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke."

3.a. - "...a loud shout like the roar of a lion..." - Three words in this verse indicate supreme power --- loud, roar and lion. Picture in your mind a giant angel, standing with one foot on land and one

in the water, roaring like a lion - a terrifying sound of impending judgment heard around the world. That would be a sight to behold and reminds us of the fact Jesus is "The Lion of Judah"; that man dare not rouse (Revelation 5:5 / Genesis 49:9-10). Yet in most New Testament descriptions Jesus appears to be anything but a Lion. He is kind, healing, forgiving, loving and nurturing. But now, with this view the term Lion begins to make perfect sense. He is the Lion of judgment, of the flood, of Sodom and Gomorrah of Egypt's plagues, who thundered from the mountain.

And where have we seen this before?

- "They will follow the Lord; He will roar like a lion..." (Hosea 11:10).
- "Listen! Listen to the roar of His voice, to the rumbling that comes from His mouth. He unleashed His lightening beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth." (Job 37:2)
- "The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem..." (Amos 1:2).
- "For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon will be darkened, the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble." (Joel 3:16).

Whether the roar comes from Jesus or an angel appointed by Him, to the Tribulation non-believer, satan and his evil followers this will be the sound of a very dangerous adversary who is on the hunt.

3.b. - "...the voices of the seven thunders spoke."

The seven "voices" of thunder is another hotly debated topic. The Greek word for thunder in this verse can be translated "to roar", which could relate it to the thunderous voice of the mighty angel. But we have seen mention of thunders before in Revelation. Chapter 4 speaks of thunder from God's throne room, which may be seen as the judgment mood of God. We also see thunders in Revelation 8:5, 11:19 and 16:18, Psalms 29:3 and Exodus 9:23, and many other verses. Each time they are associated with God moving or as a part of His severe judgments. Some believe the seven voices are the seven Seals. Others contend the voice is God's speaking judgment as a series of seven Seals, Trumpets and Bowls, and now as the seventh Trumpet comes it will release the seven final Bowls. Either way, the voice has spoken from heaven as a command of God.

4. "And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

In chapter 1 John was told to "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later" (1:19), but now he is told not to write down what he sees. Daniel was given similar instructions when he was told to "...seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future" (Daniel 8:26), and to "...roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end." (Daniel 12:4). The Bible doesn't tell us what the voice of thunder said or why John was specifically told not to write it down. Maybe it is revealed later in Revelation, or maybe it is to be revealed at God's appointed time. We simply don't know, so the best approach at this point is to let it stay as it is. The voice of God with an un-revealed meaning.

5. and 6. - 5. "Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. 6. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay!"

5.a. and 6.a. - "Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. 6. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it..."

The angel proclaims the truth of God's word to the world by raising his hand to God and recognizing Him as the supreme eternal Creator. This is not an oath like Jesus warns us about (Matthew 5:33-34 / James 5:12), because the oaths of man are marred by selfishness and sin. But the oath of the angel, made without sin, and as a selfless servant, is a proclamation that what he says or does comes from the almighty God through whom the earth and man were created, and who is now ready to put an end to His fallen creation. But what sworn truth is it the angel is about to say?

6.b. - "...and said, 'There will be no more delay!'"

The time has come. We are now at the bitter end of the Tribulation with one Trumpet remaining that will release seven rapid Bowl judgments that bring an end to God's destruction (Revelation 11:15). The original question that prompted the Olivet Discourse was an inquiry by the Apostles about this very event, "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). But the answer Jesus gave was a precursor to what we now know as the book of Revelation. They did not understand, so at His ascension they asked again, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Only one amongst them knew the answer. But He would not reveal His intent until years later when He told the story to an old man imprisoned on a rock. And what a story it is. Since the day Adam fell to sin in the garden our God had a plan to recover His creation. Just as "...God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (1 Peter 3:20), He has now waited hundreds of generations since then because "...He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). But now "There will be no more delay!". The days of final judgment will be here and when the proclamation has been made.

7. "But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his Trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

But this same proclamation had been made many times before. Jesus sent His prophets into the world to bring His message of salvation. "Because of this, God in His wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of them they will kill and others they will persecute. Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world...' (Luke 11:49). But the people were "...slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter into glory?" (Luke 24:25). But now the time has come for the gospel message to end.

The Greek term for mystery used in this context does not mean something yet to be revealed. Instead it means to shut or to close. The mystery of the gospel (the saving grace of Christ's blood) had been proclaimed by the prophets for centuries so that man would know the truth and understand the consequences, "...the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7). After the prophets it was then proclaimed through the church and in the Tribulation it will be proclaimed by the 144,000, testifying martyrs, the Two Witnesses and the proclaiming angel. But the truth of the angel's holy roar is staggering. The grace of God, so patiently offered since man's fall in the garden will soon end.

8.-10. - 8. "Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." 9. "So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.". 10. "I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour."

Picture this scene. John, the only remaining Apostle who asked Jesus for a sign of His return has now been given the sign, and with it a command - take the scroll and eat it. He is to take God's word; the truth the mighty angel proclaimed and eat it. And as he did it was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. What could this mean? So put yourself in John's place and think it through. You have just been told the time is coming to a close when the grace of God will be replaced with total destruction by God. What a wondrous time. Centuries of pain, sickness, sin and death are coming to an end. Satan, the antichrist and all who have ever followed him will be cast into hell. The tragedy of man's disobedience will now be replaced by God's eternal promised kingdom for those who believe in the works of His Son. The same kingdom man has sought for centuries as he prayed "...thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven", is near. What sweeter thing could anyone see. But wait, John realizes it is not all sweet. In one sense it is bitter. What about his lost family members and friends? What about the people he failed to witness to? What about the billions on earth who will now be utterly destroyed? O, what bitterness John must have felt as the reality of what is happening fell sour on his stomach.

11. "Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about [KJV before] many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

But we are reminded there is still a little precious time left to rescue the lost from their promised destruction. John is reminded that he, even at 95 years old, must go and share the gospel to everyone, in every place, in every language, from the meek to their rulers. This is the command Jesus gave him and us so many years ago (Matthew 28:16-20). There is still time, but the time is limited, for us and John to bring the message of hope to the whole world.

LESSON 50

Revelation chapter 11 verses 1 and 2

Chapter 11 covers two primary topics -- the two witnesses and the seventh Trumpet judgment. Given the detail and complex imagery of this chapter we're going to break it down into several lessons. First, we will focus on verses 1 and 2.

Quick Recap:

In chapter 10 and part of 11 the Revelation narrative takes another pause. As it did between the sixth and seventh Seals, we now see a shift in the story between the sixth and seventh Trumpets. The first six Trumpets will bring unbelievably destructive forces on the earth and mankind. Four of them will destroy one third of the earth's surface, vegetation, ocean water and fresh water. The fifth Trumpet announces opening of the abyss which will release millions of pent-up demons from hell who torment man for five months. The sixth will then release four fallen and demonic angels, bound for centuries in the land where sin first appeared. They will lead an army of two hundred million demons with the assignment to kill one third of the remaining population of the earth. Amidst all of this carnage the antichrist will grow in power through world-wide demonic dominance of government, finances, military power and religion. By this point he will have already abominated the temple in Jerusalem and declared himself to be god. After that he will seek to control the entire world, even through the obliterating destructions released by Jesus.

But just prior to the seventh and final Trumpet judgment God will interject a temporary pause when He sends a mighty angel to earth with a powerful proclamation of hope --- Time as we know it is nearly over and the Lord is soon returning to reclaim the creation that is rightfully His. This will be wonderful news for Tribulation believers who have come to acceptance of Christ during this period and have survived the destructions of God. But for the majority of mankind the time is drawing near when they will be totally and completely destroyed. When that happens, sin and all that it brings will be no more, satan and his followers will be locked in hell forever and the kingdom of Jesus will be established on earth as a precursor to the new heaven and new earth God will create. Yet, this is an ending that will be bitter-sweet because the return of Christ and the end of God's judgment will also signal the end of His mercy. But John is told there is still time to continue spreading the gospel of Jesus to bring to Him as many people as possible before their time runs out.

This is the context in which chapter 11 opens. Let's read the first segment of the chapter in its entirety and then focus this lesson on verses 1 and 2.

Chapter 11, verses 1-14

1. "I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers. 2. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. 3. And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." 4. They are "the two olive trees" and the two lampstands, and "they stand before the Lord of the earth." 5. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. 6. They have power to shut up the heavens so that it

will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. 7. Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. 8. Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city — which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt — where also their Lord was crucified. 9. For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. 10. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. 11. But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. 12. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here”. And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. 13. At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14. The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.”

Chapter 11, verses 1 and 2

1. "I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers”. 2. "But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months".

1. "I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers."

1.a. - "I was given..."

Several times in Revelation John does more than just observe and write. In chapter 4 he was told to "...come up here..." in order to see the throne room of God (Revelation 4:1). In chapter 5 he "...wept and wept...", a physical and emotional action in response to his perception that no one was found to open the scroll (Revelation 5:4). In chapter 9 he was told to go to the mighty angel, take the little scroll and eat it so he could experience mankind's bitter-sweet ending. (Revelation 9:9-10). Now in chapter 11 he is once again engaged in an action to help us understand its meaning. But this time he was given a special tool in order to carry out a specific task.

1.b. - "...a reed like a measuring rod..."

The reed John was given probably refers to a tall bamboo-like plant that grows in the Middle East, which in this case, is being used as a measuring rod. Think of it like a ruler that is several feet long and cut off at an exact length. A simple rod like this of a known length was used in ancient times to measure something the same way we would use a yardstick or tape measure today. Interestingly, the term "rod" is actually a known unit of measure, just like a foot, a yard or a mile. The official length of a rod, (also called a "perch", "pole" or "lug") measures 16 1/2 feet according to the standards set by the US Customary Units. John doesn't tell us how long his measuring rod is but they came in various lengths depending on their intended use. The oldest known measuring rod is a copper-alloy staff with graduated markings excavated from the Sumerian city of Nippur in present day Iraq. It is believed to have been made around 2650 BC. Other ancient measuring rods of different lengths have been excavated from archaeological sites in India, China, Egypt and across Europe. A measuring rod like these can be seen in a carving of Shamash the Egyptian sun-

god, and as part of the Greek statue of Serapis, who is depicted holding a measuring rod in his hand.

Obviously, using a rod to measure a large object was common in the ancient world, but for our study the most appropriate reference is found in the book of Ezekiel when he was taken to watch the Lord measure Israel. "In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city. He took me there, and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze; he was standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand..." - "...The length of the measuring rod in the man's hand was six cubits long..." (Ezekiel, parts of 40:3-5). With this rod the man measured the entire temple, every gate, every room, the inner courts, the outer courts and the altars. Then He said, "This is the law of the temple: all the surrounding area on top of the mountain will be most holy. Such is the law of the temple" (43:12). Then God restored the priesthood, He restored the temple and He restored Israel. In doing this He declared it holy and His. We see a similar use of a measuring rod in Revelation chapter 21. At that time, after the Millennium, the Great White Throne Judgment and creation of the new heaven, new earth and New Jerusalem, an angel uses a measuring rod of solid gold "...to measure the city, its gates and its walls." He measures the holy city of the New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven. It will be an eternal city for the children of God, but it will need no temple because, "...the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." (Revelation 21:9-23).

So why did God measure all of this?

1.c.- "...and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God..."

So given what we now know, let's talk about "why" John would be told to measure the temple, the altar and its worshipers? Think about it this way, when you buy a house what do you want to know? How many square feet it is; right? What about when you buy a piece of land? How many acres. What about when you put gas in your car? How many gallons. We have an inner-need for numbers and measures to help us understand and quantify the things of life in size, weight, distance and time. For example, you would never go to the store to buy a product if you had no idea what the price was. The price in dollars is a measure of value. Likewise you would never buy a piece of land and not know how big it is. Its dimensions in feet or acres are a measure of what you just bought. More importantly, it shows what you own. Ownership of a house or land or gas in our car is important. We bought it, so we want to know what we bought, and we want to understand what is ours. That's why we measure it. Not only to know what we have, but also as a measure of ownership.

So given that fact let's talk about just a few examples in the Bible to see how God "measures" what He does. These not only quantify His measuring actions, but since He stipulated a specific time, duration or size in His actions it also shows His supreme ownership.

- God created the earth and universe in six days and rested on the seventh. Everything He created is His and He proclaimed it very good (Genesis 1).
- In Genesis 5 God gives us the age of each Patriarch of the faith from Adam to Noah. He created them, He charted their path in life and He set the number of days they would live.
- Noah didn't have a choice to build the ark the way he wanted. God stipulated it would be exactly three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. He then said that seven days after entering the ark it would rain for forty days and forty nights. He even tells us

when the ark settled on dry ground that Noah was six hundred and one years old and they left the ark on the twenty-seventh day of the second month. God leaves nothing to chance but measured and orchestrated every move of His plan. He even closed the door Himself, because it was His to close. (Genesis 6-8).

- We know Jacob had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. Throughout the Old Testament the twelve tribes is a common measure of Israel's actions, victories, blessings and curses (Genesis 46 / 49 / Exodus 1 / Numbers 1 / Deuteronomy 33).
- Later Jacob and his sons went to Egypt to escape a famine. Their descendants, the future nation of Israel, was held captive there for 430 years (Exodus 12).
- There are ten commandments, and within these ten God characterized every sin of man (Exodus 20).
- God wrote an entire book of the Bible we call "Numbers" because on, "...the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt" God commanded Moses to take a count (census) "...of every man by name; one by one..." (Numbers 1:1-2). The men over twenty years old who were counted by Moses, Aaron and twelve leaders of Israel totaled 603,550 (Numbers 1:44).
- God gave Daniel an end-times vision that prophesied the exact number of years in "weeks", to describe one of the Bible's most important series of prophecies. The period of seventy "weeks" are actually seventy periods of seven years each or 490 years. The first seven "week" segment ($7 \times 7 = 49$ years) was for the rebuilding of Jerusalem which started in 445 BC. The next segment of sixty-two "weeks" (62 seven year periods or 434 years) spans from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the triumphal entry of Christ and His crucifixion. (Daniel 9:24-26 / Nehemiah 2:1-8) . Combined, that number ($49+434$) equals sixty-nine "weeks" or 483 years. Using the 360 days Hebrew calendar would then set the day of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on April 6th, 32AD. The middle of the same week in which He was crucified. Then the final "week" (the seventieth period of seven years) which is more accurately called the "Seventieth Week of Daniel", is the seven year period we now know as the Tribulation. All together this equals 490 years ($49+434+7$). Wow! Wow! Wow!
- We know the exact number of fish and loaves Jesus would break, and the numbers of people He would feed with them. We also know how many baskets of leftovers were gathered by the twelve Disciples (John 6).
- We know the number of coins given to Judas to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:15 - which incidentally is also the price of a slave - Exodus 21:32).
- We know the number of times Peter would deny Jesus (John 18).
- And, we know the number of times Jesus would ask Peter for his love (John 21:15-16).
- We know the hour of the day when Jesus died on the cross (Luke 23:44).
- And the number of days He was in the tomb (John 20).
- After His resurrection we see a miraculous catch of 153 fish as directed by Jesus (John 21:11).
- In Revelation:
 - Jesus spoke to seven churches (Revelation 2-3).
 - There are twenty-four elders (Revelation 4).
 - There are Four Living Creatures (Revelation 4).
 - There are ten thousand times ten thousand angels around God's throne (Revelation 5).
 - The Tribulation will last seven years, with the Great Tribulation being a time+times+half-a-time", $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, 42 months or 1,260 days (Daniel 9 / Revelation 11).

- During this time there will be seven Seals, seven Trumpets and seven Bowl judgments (Revelation 6-11).
- There will be 144,000 converted Jewish preachers and two witnesses (Revelation 7 / 11 / 14).
- There will be four fallen angels held by God in captivity to command two hundred million demons in satan's army. The angels were held "...for this very hour and day and month and year..." (Revelation 9).
- There will be one thousand years in our Lord's Millennial reign (Revelation 20).
- And He even numbers the hairs on our head (Luke 12:7).

So why is all of this so important? Because God does nothing out of chance. Whatever He does is planned to perfection and numbered in intent. It is this exactness that defines God's supreme authority. God measures because God creates and God measure because God owns. We see this clearly in Zechariah 2, which is not only another example of measuring, but the measuring helps clarify who the owner is, "Then I looked up, and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, 'Where are you going?' He answered me, 'To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.' --- 'And I myself will be a wall around it, declares the Lord, and I will be its glory within.'" (Zechariah 2:1 and 5). God measures because God owns and He declares what He owns with such precision there is no doubt.

So let's go back to why would God tell John to measure the temple during the Tribulation? Because He directed its dimensions. He directed its location. It is exactly how He wants it. --- He doesn't measure it to find out what the dimensions are; He already knows that. He measures it because He owns it, and He wants us to know that.

1.d. - "...and the altar..."

So what does it tell us that John measured the altar? Recall in chapter 8 we studied the angel before God's throne who made an offering to God of incense and prayers (Revelation 8:3-4). This is probably speaking of the golden Altar of Incense which was in the Tabernacle's Holy Place and set before the vail separating the Holy of Holies, (The Most Holy Place) which housed the Ark of the Covenant. Only the chief priest was allowed to enter this area and make offerings on this altar. But in chapter 6 we saw the martyrs under the altar at the opening of the fifth Seal. Since they are sacrificed believers who are under the altar this may represent the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering (Exodus 29:12). This altar was located in the outer area of the Tabernacle and would be the place where the priests and worshipers would gather for the offering. --- Incidentally, in reference to God's measurements of ownership, both of these altars we made to His exact dimensions (Exodus 27:1-2 / Exodus 30:1-3 / 6-8 and 10).

1.e. - "...with its worshipers..."

So if the altar John measures is at the temple and if the worshipers are around the altar, then who are the worshipers? Jews. They represent Israel. We know from 2nd Thessalonians the temple will be rebuilt during the early Tribulation when the antichrist makes a false peace with Israel. "He [antichrist] will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming to be God." (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Obviously, in order to set himself up in the temple, then the temple will have to be rebuilt. We also know there will be an altar in the temple because Daniel was told, "He will confirm a covenant [peace treaty] with many [Israel] for one seven [Tribulation]. In the middle of the seven

[3 1/2 years] he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up [an idol to himself] an abomination that causes desolation..." (Daniel 9:27). So clearly, from the time the antichrist comes on the scene until the mid-point of the Tribulation, Israel will have a temple and will have reestablished the Old Testament sacrificial system.

The Tribulation period will certainly include Gentiles as well, and by the millions. But, the Tribulation - which is more accurately called "The Seventieth Week of Daniel" --- is intended for Daniel's people (Jews / Israel) and Daniel's holy city (Jerusalem) to repent. This is the time when the remnant of Israel will finally recognize Jesus as the Messiah and turn to Him as their king. And it is at this time He will "...finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, [the sins of Israel's rejection] to bring everlasting righteousness, [righteousness through their salvation] to seal up vision and prophecy [because it is no longer needed and all prophecy is fulfilled] and to anoint the Most Holy Place" (Daniel 9:24). This is the time when "...the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Revelation 11:13), and they will finally "...look on Me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:10), because, "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity." (Zechariah 13:1).

By measuring the temple, the altar and the people of Israel God shows His ownership of them all.

2. "But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months."

2.a. - "But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles." The temple area included an outer court separated by a low wall from the inner court. Sometimes called the "Gentile Court", this was the only area a Gentile was allowed to enter. But at this point in the Tribulation God does not claim ownership of this area because it will have been tarnished by the sin of Tribulation non-believers. This will be after the time the antichrist will desecrate the temple and use it as a place for worship of himself. But this desecration goes beyond the temple.

2.b. - "...They will trample on the holy city for 42 months."

We see this in the Olivet Discourse when Jesus said, "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24). Since their captivity under Babylon in 586BC Jerusalem has been occupied by many generations of Gentiles. It has been fought over sixteen times, destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times and recaptured 44 times. This includes attacks by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, European Crusaders, Mongols, and Ottomans, until partially restored in 1948 and its capital recognized by the United States in 2019. The Psalmist speaks of these invasions in grief, "O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. (Psalms 79:1). And the prophet Isaiah also predicts a time when, "For a little while your people possessed your holy place, but now our enemies have trampled down your sanctuary." (Isaiah 63:18). Even today, Israel it is under constant pressure (politically and militarily) from Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Europe, and even by liberal leaders America. This will continue until Christ's returns and plants His feet on Mount Zion (Revelation 14:1).

The 42 months is another way of numbering the 3-1/2 year second half of the Tribulation -- which is 42 months from the time the antichrist abominated and desolated the temple and declared himself to be God. It is also to span of time when he will have the most authority (Revelation 13:5). Going forward we will also see the 42 months cited as 3-1/2 years, 1,260 days, "...time, times and half a time..." ($1+2+1/2 = 3-1/2$), and in Daniel 9:24 as "...the middle of the seven..." ($7 = 3-1/2+3-1/2$). (Revelation 12:14).

This now sets the stage for God to make another move to show His mercy to the remainder of mankind, who as we will see continue to follow satan and deny Christ.

Next we will study verses 3-5...

3. And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." 4. They are "the two olive trees" and the two lampstands, and "they stand before the Lord of the earth." 5. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.

LESSON 51

Revelation chapter 11 verses 3 and 4

Quick Recap:

Chapter 11 covers two primary topics:

- The two witnesses and,
- The seventh Trumpet judgment.

Because this chapter includes so much complex imagery we're breaking it down into several lessons. First, we studied verses 1 and 2. Then we'll focus on verses 3 and 4.

Recall from our last lesson that God will initiate another time of mercy. The last time we saw this was in chapter 7 when God will pause between the sixth and seventh Seals to temporarily shift focus from destruction to grace. He will do this by sending 144,000 converted Jews to spread the gospel. This will result in the multitudes before the throne at the end of chapter 7 who come to Christ during the Tribulation. Now, just as He did between the sixth and seventh Seals, God will show mercy between the sixth and seventh Trumpets. He will do this by sending a mighty angel with a proclamation of hope --- Christ is soon returning and final destruction is near, but there will still be time to turn to Him for redemption. --- This message will come through several sources, the 144,000, the testimony of those who have been saved during the Tribulation, the proclaiming angel (Revelation 14:6), and through two men who will be sent by God as witnesses to preach salvation in Jerusalem. As we will now see, these men will have already been at work preaching through the second half of the Tribulation as God makes every effort to turn Israel to His Son - their unrecognized Messiah.

And now let's focus on Chapter 11, verses 3 and 4.

3. "And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

3.a. - "And I will appoint my two witnesses..."

Throughout the Tribulation God is in total control. Not only is He orchestrating every judgment action, but here He is appointing two men to bring testimony of His grace and the message is clear, God is the one who will appoint, and those He appoints are His.

So why are there two men? Probably because the Bible tells us that two or more witnesses are required to collaborate the truth.

Here are a few examples:

- In Deuteronomy God gives direction for the execution of those worshiping idols (a serious accusation that needed clear and undisputed testimony). "On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness." (Deuteronomy 17:6).
- Jesus stresses the same principle when discussing sin in the church, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have

won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Matthew 18:15-16).

- Jesus also clarified the accuracy of His own testimony to the wicked Pharisees when He said, "...I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am the one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." (John 8:15-18).
- The same principle applies here. God's assignment of two witnesses will collaborate His story from more than one source. To their largely Jewish audience this will be a clear message their testimony is true.

3.b. - "...and they will prophesy for 1,260 days..."

For this let's step back a bit and recall what we've learned about the Tribulation timeline. We've gone over this several times before but it won't hurt to periodically review it again.

In Daniel 9:24-26 Gabriel said, "Seventy sevens are decreed for your people..." ... "...from the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler comes, there will be seven "sevens", and sixty-two "sevens". It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two "sevens", the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing."

In these verses the King James version uses the term "weeks" to describe each of the seventy time periods. More modern translations refer to this as "sevens" because it appears through scripture that each "week" would be a seven year period, or a "seven". Whichever word you use, it refers to seventy periods of seven years each.

Here's the math (using the Hebrew lunar calendar of 360 days):

- The period of seventy "sevens" [KJV "weeks"] are actually seventy periods of seven years each. This totals 490 years (70x7).
- The first period of seven "sevens" is the time required to rebuild Jerusalem after the exile (7x7=49 years). We know from history this started in 445 BC.
- The next segment of sixty-two "sevens" is 62 seven-year periods for a total of 434 years (7x62). This spans from the end of rebuilding Jerusalem (the first "seven" period) to the triumphal entry of Christ and His crucifixion (Daniel 9:24-26 / Nehemiah 2:1-8).
- Combining those time spans (49+434) equals sixty-nine "sevens" or 483 years.
- But 69 "sevens" totaling 483 years leaves one "seven" remaining to reach the prophesied total of 70. This means there is one unaccounted for seven-year period.
- This 70th "seven" period of seven years is accounted for in the period of future time we call the Tribulation. A period more accurately called the "Seventieth Week of Daniel". This results in 49 years+434 years+7 years = 490 years.
- Therefore, the period of time between the 69th "sevens" and the 70th seven (from the end of Jesus' first coming until now) is the period we live in today - the "church age". This age will end at the beginning of the 70th "seven" when the church is raptured and the Tribulation starts. This final and 70th "seven" period is the seven years we are now studying in the book of Revelation.

Whew! So what does all that have to do with 1,260 days?

Let's see...

- The Tribulation is seven years (the 70th).
- Half of seven years is 3-1/2 years.
- Daniel 9:27 speaks of the antichrist and actions he will take at the mid-point of the seven year period, when, "...In the middle of the seven...", he will break his false treaty with Israel (remember the white horse and rider in chapter 6?) and abominate the new temple by going there and declaring himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Daniel 9:27). From that point -- half-way through the seven years until he is destroyed, -- the antichrist will grow in power as he forms his demonic empire.

So, to clarify the terminology:

- In Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 the 3-1/2 year period is called "...time (1)+times (2)+half a time (1/2)". That equals 3-1/2.
- Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 refers to the 3-1/2 years as 42 months.
- Revelation 11:3 refers to the 3-1/2 years as 1,260 days.

From all of this we know the two witnesses will preach the gospel for 1,260 days, which is 3-1/2 years, or 42 months, or a time+ times+half a time, all of which describe half of the Tribulation period.

3.c. - "...clothed in sackcloth..."

Sackcloth was a coarse, heavy, hot and uncomfortable garment made from woven goat or camel hair. Generally it was worn at times of great sorrow, grief and humility. We see indications of this several times in the Bible.

- When Joseph was sold by his brothers into captivity, his father Jacob, "...tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days." (Genesis 37:34).
- When David heard that Joab had murdered Abner he said, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in the morning in front of Abner..." (2 Samuel 3:31).
- Interestingly, John the Baptist also wore "...clothes made of camel hair...", (Matthew 3:4), as did the prophet Elijah who "...had a garment of hair..." (2 Kings 1:8). Although neither of these references specifically cite their garments as "sackcloth", Zechariah clarifies this type of clothing as "...a prophets garment of hair..." (Zechariah 13:4).

The two witnesses will be like a prophet in that they will undoubtedly declare to Israel a prophetic warning that future destruction is coming. But their primary focus will be to spread the gospel to the people of Israel who still fail to recognize Jesus as their Messiah.

Given this, the reference to sackcloth is indication they know time is running out and the majority of God's people in Israel will perish along with the rest of the unbelieving world. This brings them great sorrow and grief.

4. "They are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, and they stand before the Lord of the earth."

The Bible doesn't tell us who these two men are but Zechariah 4 gives us an indication of who they are like. We could spend hours discussing the two men in Zechariah 4 and what they represent,

but for the purpose of our immediate study let's hit the high spots to see how they might link to our study of Revelation 11. In Zechariah 4 the prophet recounts a vision related to Joshua, the high priest of Israel, and Zerubbabel, a Jewish civil leader and descendant of king David (royal lineage). These two men represent the spiritual and governmental functions in Israel, and as such also represent the priesthood and the Law. These men had returned together from exile in Babylon and set to work rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1 / 3:2). This would allow Israel to re-establish her sacrificial system and their place as God's messenger to the world. In his vision Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with seven lamps and a small bowl on top that acted as a reservoir to provide a constant flow of fuel. He also saw two olive trees; a plant whose oil was used as a type of lamp fuel. The lamp represents Israel as the light of God's word to the world. A light fueled by the olive trees. This is akin to us being a light of the world who are fueled by the Holy Spirit as our never-exhausting fuel of faith. When Zechariah asked what the lamp and trees represent he was told "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth." (Zechariah 4:14). Although this vision speaks directly to the restoration of post-exile Israel, it also speaks of the combined offices of high priest and king (David's lineage) and prophetically points to Jesus as the supreme King. We see this in chapter 6 which speaks to Joshua wearing a crown, but in reality points to the Messiah, and specifically His role in the Millennial Kingdom, "Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed in majesty and will sit and rule on his throne." (Zechariah 6:12-13). In summary, Joshua and Zerubbabel represented both the spiritual and ruling aspects of Israel in their re-established kingdom. But they also give us a picture of the coming kingdom of Christ where He is both the spiritual and ruling King.

So now we see two witnesses described in Revelation as, "...the two olive trees and the two lampstands, and they stand before the Lord of the earth". These men, fed by the Holy Spirit, and representing God have returned to Israel as had Joshua and Zerubbabel. They are the light and fuel; the offering and the Law. They are here to witness of the redemption possible so that Israel will turn back to their Messiah.

But other than a comparison to the lamp and olive tree, who are these men? The Bible doesn't say so we can't be certain. As with most of Revelation there are many opinions, but there is one train of thought that may provide a plausible option. So at the risk of speculation (which we never want to do) let's look at some other scripture that might at least help us wrap our head around who these men might be.

- When we think of someone who might be appointed by the Father as His witness on earth we of course think of Jesus. But Jesus is one man, and although He said Him and the Father are two witnesses, (John 8:15-18), He is performing other tasks while these men are on earth.
- Or we might think of angels like the ones who witnessed for Jesus after His ascension, "...when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them..." and said, " This same Jesus, who has been taken from you to heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:10 and 11).
- But there's another suggestion based on their actions and abilities.
 - Who were the two men selected by God to return to earth to communicate with Jesus prior to His crucifixion? Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration. (Matthew 17:3 / Mark 9:1-8).

- Moses, as the keeper of the Ten Commandments represents the Law, (Deuteronomy 5:1) and Elijah was a minister for God; a prophet (1 Kings 17:1). I find it interesting that when Jesus was explaining His place in God's word to the two doubting men on the road to Emmaus, Luke recounts, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself." (Luke 24:44). Although not directly related to the two witnesses, it clarifies the truth of God's word through Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, and the Prophets, who brought God's prophetic message. This is exactly what the two witnesses will do.
- Jews believed Moses and Elijah would return. Of Moses they cited, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me [Moses] from among you, your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him." (Deuteronomy 18:15). And of Elijah, "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes" (Malachi 4:5).
- Both men had amazing powers we will see again in Revelation:
 1. They can call down fire: (Revelation 11:5 / 1 Kings 18:36-38).
 2. They will shut down rain for 3-1/2 years (the 1,260 day time of their witness) just as Elijah had done, (Revelation 11:6 / 1 Kings 17:1). According to James 5:17 Elijah's commanded drought was also 3-1/2 years.
 3. They will turn rivers into blood just as Moses had done, (Revelation 11:6 / Exodus 7:17).
 4. They will strike the earth with plagues. Similar to what Moses did in Egypt (Revelation 11:6 / Exodus chapters 7-11).
 5. Both had an unusual ending. Moses died on Mount Nebo in Moab and God buried him, "...but to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deuteronomy 34:6). But even more interesting is the fact that Michael the archangel and satan the fallen angel fought over the body of Moses (Jude 9). But why would satan want Moses' body? And why would God send Michael to protect it? Possibly so it could not be used by satan for some evil scheme? Or because it would be used again by Moses on the mount of transfiguration? Or maybe even because it would be used again as one of two witnesses in Jerusalem? We don't know, but it is certainly an interesting question. ---- So too with Elijah, because he did not die at all. Instead, "...a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11).

So, as stated, we cannot be certain that Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses, but I at least wanted you to see scripture related to roles of Joshua the priest, and Zerubbabel, a descendant of king David, plus a plausible connection through the parallel actions of Elijah the prophet and Moses the Law giver. But whoever they are we need to see their role for what it is. During the Tribulation two men will witness in Jerusalem for 1,260 days. They will bring the unwanted truth to a disobedient and sinful nation that Jesus is their King. As we will see, most Jews will reject their message just as they rejected Jesus, but ironically, the death and resurrection of the two witnesses will be recognized by the whole world and a portion of Israel will give glory to God.

LESSON 52

Revelation chapter 11 verses 5 and 6

Quick Recap:

Chapters 10 and 11 provide a pause between the sixth and seventh Trumpets to initiate another time of mercy. We saw a similar pause earlier between the sixth and seventh Seals when God introduced the 144,000 Jewish witnesses to spread the gospel during the Tribulation. Then in chapter 10 God will send a mighty angel with the proclamation that Jesus is soon returning to retake His rightful place as sovereign Judge and King. But before He returns John was reminded there is still time to share the gospel with the world before it is too late (Revelation 10:1-11). But God knows His word will not come back empty (Isaiah 55:11), so even during this time of severe and final judgment He will show mercy over and over by sending the gospel through 144,000 Jewish evangelists, testimony of the Tribulation saints, a proclaiming angel and two men who will focus their attention on Israel. These two men are the focus on chapter 11. We don't know who they are but we know they will be chosen specifically by God for this critically important task.

In this lesson we will uncover a little more detail about what these men will do during their short ministry. We'll also talk at length about how their actions parallel those of Moses and Elijah, and how this paints a picture of God's consistent plan. In the next lesson we'll discuss whether or not the world will accept the two witnesses and how their story will end.

Chapter 11, verses 5 and 6.

The Bible doesn't tell us who the two witnesses are, but it gives us hints about their character and actions. In our last lesson we discussed a similar story in Zechariah chapter 4 about Joshua the high priest (not the Joshua of the exodus) and Zerubbabel the civil servant. Like the two witnesses of Revelation these men were also called a lampstand and an olive tree; a picture of them as light and fuel bringing revival to post-exile Jerusalem. This is also a picture of our own testimony for Christ (our light) through the power of the Holy Spirit (our fuel). The story of Joshua and Zerubbabel presents two scenarios; a contemporary view of post-exile restoration of the temple, and a future vision of Christ as High Priest and King in the Millennial Kingdom. (Hebrews 4:14-15 / 8:1-2 / Revelation 20:4). We also talked about an interesting comparison between the two witnesses of Revelation and the actions of Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament. Both men were patriarchal leaders in Israel's early history -- one as a chief prophet and one as keeper of the Law. (Deuteronomy 5:1 / 1 Kings 17:1). Both were obviously key messengers for God. Not only because they were important figures in the Old Testament, but they were also the two men sent by God to meet with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. (Matthew 17:3 / Mark 9:1-8). Although the Bible doesn't say the two witnesses are Moses and Elijah we poked at the interesting connection between them based on the fact God gave both teams similar, unique and supernatural powers to bring His judgment message upon sinful man. In this lesson we'll look at a few examples in more detail.

Moses was sent to Egypt by God to seek release of Jacob's [Israel's] descendants from bondage. When the pharaoh refused, God gave Moses the ability to perform powerful supernatural

judgments upon Egypt. God did this so Israel and Egypt would see His unlimited power and recognize that Moses was His messenger, "This, said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has appeared to you. (Exodus 4:5). As a result of this assignment, Moses was given the power to turn water into blood and cast plagues upon the people and their land. He also brought the message of redemption and warned the people that unless their firstborn were covered in the blood of the spotless lamb they would surely die (Exodus 7-12). Because of the great punishment God inflicted on Egypt through Moses the people of Jacob were released to journey on an exodus to God's promised land. At the same time the doctrine of salvation was reinforced that sin must be atoned by blood. The same doctrine that will be preached to Israel again by the two witnesses (Genesis 3:21 / Exodus 12:13 / Leviticus 4 / John 1:29 / Revelation 5:6 / 11:3).

As with Moses, God will send His future witnesses to Israel during the Tribulation. By that point Israel will have fallen into deep sin. So much so that Revelation uses the word Egypt to describe Israel, because Egypt was viewed as a place of sin. Like Moses, the two witnesses will seek the release of Jacob's descendants from satan's bondage of sin. They will do so by emphasizing God's message of Messianic grace through the shed blood of the spotless Lamb. But they, like Moses, will not only witness but will physically show God's destructive power of judgment. Those who accept Christ will literally go to the eternal promised land, but those who reject Him will perish forever.

Verses 5 and 6 provide several other examples of the powers given to the two witnesses by God. Powers that are very similar to the those given to Moses and Elijah thousands of years before. But let me stop here and stress again, I'm not saying Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses, but through a comparative study of both groups we can see at least the consistency of God's actions from the early judgments in Genesis and Exodus to the final judgments during the Tribulation. This provides another platform to tie-together the actions of God in both the Old and New Testaments.

5."If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die."

5.a. - "If anyone tries to harm them,..."

Obviously there will be great resistance to the two witnesses. That's understandable considering they will be preaching judgment and salvation to an unredeemed people who have persisted for generation after generation in rejecting God's grace through Christ as their Messiah and King. By this point in the Tribulation most people will worship the antichrist. This alone would make them enemies of the two witnesses, but their hatred will increase even more as they listen for three and a half years to two men who proclaim a Messiah they do not believe in and hear of God's judgment that awaits them if they do not repent. Remember, these will be some of the same people who pray to the mountains for death even though they recognize the judgments they suffer come from God and the Lamb (Revelation 6:15-17).

We saw similar resistance when Moses led the fledgling Hebrew nation along the forty-year road to the promised land. Year after year the ungrateful people fell into sin. They worshiped idols, criticized Moses, turned against God and pleaded to return to Egypt - the place of sin and idolatry (Exodus 16:2-3 / 17:2 / 32:1 / Numbers 14:1-4). In fact, we see the same thing happening

throughout the Old Testament as Israel goes through many cycles of obedience and disobedience, resulting in periods judgment, curses and exile. More importantly, we saw Israel reject God [Jesus] even when He walked the earth before them and fulfilled the prophecies they knew so well. Just as most of the original exodus travelers died in route because of their disobedience and never reached the promised land --- so too will those who reject the message of the two witnesses will fail to survive the Tribulation.

5.b. - "...fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies."

Man's resistance to the two witnesses will be so severe that God will give them power to completely destroy all who attack them. We see a similar destructive force later in Revelation when Jesus destroys the army of the antichrist with, "...the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse...", [Jesus] (Revelation 19:21).

5.c. - We also see a similar comparison in the judgment power God gave to Elijah. In 1 Kings 18 the prophet recounts a time when Israel had fallen deeply into sin and worshiped the god baal; the mythical god of rain and storms (Judges 2:11). Israel's sinful king Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel, "...did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him". He, "...married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve baal and worship him." - "Ahab also made an asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him." (1 Kings 16:30-31 / 18:4). As punishment God sent drought and famine across the land, yet Israel resisted the prophet's warning and continued in their sin. So the prophet Elijah demanded Ahab "...bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of baal and the four hundred prophets of asherah who eat at Jezebel's table...", to meet him on Mount Carmel. There he challenged the eight hundred and fifty evil prophets to erect an altar to baal, and Elijah erected an altar to the God of Abraham. Each would then call upon their god/God to bring fire upon the offering. The prophets of baal, "...called on the name of baal from morning till noon. 'baal, answer us!' they shouted. But there was no response..." -- "...so they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears..." - "But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention." -- When the priests stopped, exhausted and bleeding, Elijah flooded his altar with water to make it even more difficult to burn. He then called on the, "...Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are the God of Israel and that I am your servant...". - "Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, 'The Lord - He is God! The Lord - He is God!' - Elijah then slaughtered all the priests of baal. (1 Kings 18: excerpts from verses 16-40).

We see a similar event at the end of the Millennial Reign when Jesus releases satan from the abyss for a short time to, "...go out and deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breath of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city He loves. [Jerusalem]. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them." (Revelation 20:8-10).

6. "They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want."

There are several parallel Old Testament judgments related to Moses and Elijah that are very similar to verse 6:

6.a.1 - "They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying;..."

As previously discussed Elijah was given power to control the rain, "Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.'" (1 Kings 17:1) - We know from James 5:17 the "...next few years..." it did not rain was three and a half years. This is the same length of time it will not rain during the ministry of the two witnesses. We know this because Revelation 11:6 says it "...will not rain during the time they are prophesying;...[preaching]...", which as we know from 11:3 is, "...for 1,260 days..." -- which is three and a half years. - What I also find interesting is that God gave these powers to Elijah to use as he saw fit. In 1 Kings 17:1 Elijah says it will not rain "...except at my word." - His word, through the anointing power of God would dictate when it would rain and when it would not. Likewise. Revelation 11:6 says "...They have power..." to control the rain. Maybe it's semantics, but I think it's interesting that in both cases God gave His witnesses the "power" and the "word" to dictate when and how these judgments would occur.

6.b. - "...and they have power to turn the waters into blood..."

We see the same thing here. In this case God said "...they have power..." to turn water into blood. As we saw in the judgments on Egypt this will be a significant punishment for the Tribulation people. "This is what the Lord says: By this you will know that I am the Lord! With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood." - "The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink the water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt." (Exodus 7:17 and 21). The two witnesses will also have this power which will undoubtedly result in even greater devastation because it will not be limited just to the Nile, but to all of "...the waters..." of the earth.

6.c. - "...and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want."

This verse makes it clear God will give these men the power to cast judgment through Him upon the whole earth, "...with every kind of plague...", and to do it "...as often as they want...". We get a picture of what this might be like when Moses cast plagues upon Egypt. Although they were not "...every kind of plague..." it takes five chapters in Exodus to explain them all, and gives us an indication of the powers that will be given to the two witnesses:

- "I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood." (Exodus 7:17),
- "I will send a plague of frogs on your whole country..." (Exodus 8:2)
- "All the dust throughout Egypt became gnats..." (Exodus 8:17)
- "I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses." (Exodus 8:21)
- "...the hand of the Lord will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field..." (Exodus 9:3)
- "...festering boils will break out on people and animals throughout the land." (Exodus 9:9)
- "...I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt..." (Exodus 9:18)
- "...I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen." (Exodus 10:4-5)
- "Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days." (Exodus 10:22)

- "This is what the Lord says; 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die...' (Exodus 11:4).

So even though Moses and Elijah may not be the two witnesses, at a minimum they present an interesting parallel that helps us understand the consistency of God's judgment actions. We tend to think of the book of Revelation as a book of judgment, which it is, but I also want us to pull the thread on the rest of the Bible in order to realize that Revelation is simply the culmination of God's judgment actions across the entire Biblical time line.

Let's look at just a few examples so we can understand their connections to our overall Revelation study:

- Early in Genesis, satan tempted man into sin. When he did God immediately cast judgment on His creation -- on the earth, on man and on satan.
- On satan - "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers [Jesus]; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel." (Genesis 3:14-15).
- On woman - "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe..." (Genesis 3:16)
- On man - "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground..." (Genesis 3:19) "So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground..." (Genesis 3:23).
- On creation - "Cursed is the ground because of you..." - "...It will produce thorns and thistles for you..." (Genesis 3:17-18).
- On Cain - "Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground..." - "When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." (Genesis 4:11-12).
- The Flood - "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created..." (Genesis 6:7) - "Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out..." (Genesis 7:23).
- Ham, the son of Noah and father of Canaan "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will be to his brothers" (Genesis 9:25).
- The scattering of sinners - "That is why it was called Babel - because the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth." (Genesis 11:9).
- God's people fall into deep sin - "Then the Lord rained down sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah - from the Lord out of the heavens" (Genesis 19:24).
- The Exodus - Moses cast judgment after judgment upon the sin of Egypt until, "The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. 'For otherwise', they said, 'we will all die!'" (Exodus 12:33).
- A dire warning and prophetic view - "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder..." (Exodus 19:18-19).
- For idolatry - "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them." (Exodus 32:9-10).

- Levitical Law - Reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience (Leviticus 26 / Deuteronomy 28).
- The Exile - "So Judah went into captivity, away from her land." (2 Kings 25:21) - "So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria..." (2 Kings 17:23).
- Eternal judgment without Christ - "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned." - "...God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!" (Romans 5:12 and 17).
- The judgment of a continually sinful heart - "...so God gave them over to a depraved mind..." (Romans 1:28).
- Judgment on the cross - "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross..." (1 Peter 2:24).
- Judgment of the saved - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ..." (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- The Temple and Israel destroyed (AD 70) - "...not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down." (Matthew 24:2).
- Destructive signs - "...wars and rumors of wars / famines / earthquakes / labor pains..." (Matthew 24:6-8).
- The seven Seals, seven Trumpets and seven Bowls of judgment upon man, creation and satan (Revelation 6 / 11 / 16).
- The final judgment of satan - "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur..." (Revelation 20:10).
- The final judgment of unrepentant man - "Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

Do you see the connection? From the very first sin in the garden God has judged creation in a very consistent way. Beginning in Genesis 3 all the way through Revelation God casts His judgments on man, on His natural creation and on satan.

There were a number of ways I could have taught verses 5 and 6, but given their focus on God's judgment actions through the two witnesses I thought it best to focus on those actions and tie them to other judgments of God. Why? Because I want you to see the common thread of judgment throughout the Bible. From the first sin to the last God has reacted in two ways; obedience is met with blessings and disobedience with judgment. And unfortunately, mankind tends to be very disobedient. This continues today and will do so until the last judgment action in Revelation destroys the remnant of the hold-out non-believers. The two witnesses, and the powers given to them by God clearly illustrates in the end of the Bible the same thing we saw at the beginning - God offers, man rebels and judgment is the response. But even though God punished Adam and Eve for their sin He showed grace and made a blood sacrifice to atone their sin. God made the same offer to Cain, to the people who died in the flood, to the exiled Israelites, to every human through history. He offered Adam and Eve a perfect garden before He cursed it with thorns and thistles. He offered man the example of Noah long before He closed the door on salvation. He sent Moses to Egypt to gather His people before He sent them wandering for forty years. He sent Himself, in the person of the Son, to bring grace and mercy, but they nailed Him to a cross. Each and every judgment action was preventable if man had simply turned to God as their Lord. Certainly the two witnesses will bring destructive forces, but first they will bring the gospel to those who will listen and heed the offer of God's grace.

LESSON 53

Revelation, chapter 11 verses 7 – 14

Quick Recap:

As we have seen, chapter 10 and part of 11 provide another period of God's mercy. In the middle of destruction, between the sixth and seventh Trumpet judgments, God tells us of a mighty angel who will proclaim the return of Jesus. John is then reminded that Christ's return will be bittersweet. Sweet in the sense that He will return to destroy all sin and with His believers will enter His one-thousand year Millennial Reign, but bitter in the sense that many of those who will be destroyed are friends, family and neighbors who would not accept Jesus. John is then reminded that time still remains for the gospel to be shared to the world.

In the first two verses of chapter 11 we saw God's sovereign ownership and His focus on recovering the remnant of Israel. To illustrate this he directed John to measure the temple, its altar and worshipers, [Israel] but not to measure the courtyard which represents the disobedient Gentile world. To reach Israel He will send two witnesses for three and a half years. He refers to them as the lampstands and olive trees, a character reference to Joshua and Zerubbabel in Zechariah chapter 4. They give us a view of the post-exile reconstruction of Israel's temple, but also a prophetic view of Christ in His Millennial Kingdom. Although we don't know who the two witnesses are we spent time discussing the similarities between them and the actions and powers of Moses and Elijah. Although we can't say for certain that Moses and Elijah are the two witnesses, the comparison gave us an opportunity to discuss the common-thread of God's consistent judgment actions from Genesis 3 through Revelation.

And with that context we will now discuss the outcome of the two witnesses.

7. "Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them."

7.a. - "Now when they have finished their testimony...,".

We know from verse 3 the two witnesses were appointed by God to witness for 1,260 days. That's the same as three and a half years, which is half of the seven year Tribulation period. This will be a predetermined time in which they will proclaim the gospel, and in doing so they will also illustrate God's coming final judgment with fire, drought and plagues on the earth (Revelation 11:3-5). This will be a clear message that grace is available through Christ the Messiah, but great punishment will come upon those who reject Him.

7.b. - "...the beast that comes up from the Abyss..."

This is the antichrist; a human who will become history's most evil puppet of satan. Aptly named the antichrist, he will be against anything related to Christ as he seeks to take His place. His demonic source of power is indicated by the term "...comes up from the Abyss..." -- which is literally, the power of hell. We saw him in Gabriel's vision to Daniel, giving us a prophecy of a future covenant [treaty] with Israel for seven years, but after three and a half years [the mid-point of the Tribulation] he will abominate the temple in Jerusalem by declaring himself to be God (Daniel 9:26-27). He is also "...the man of lawlessness" spoken of by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3,

the "king of Babylon in Isaiah 14:4, and the "little horn" in Daniel 7:8. He is mentioned thirty-six times in the book of Revelation. First in chapter 6 as the white horse and rider who will bring false-peace to Israel (Revelation 6:2). Then in chapters 12-14, where he is described as the beast out of the sea, we will see a more detailed glimpse into his actions as he blasphemes God for forty-two months [three and a half years] and seeks to rule the world.

7.c. - "...will attack them, and overpower and kill them..."

Scripture is not clear how the two witnesses will be killed or whether or not they will resist, but the way their death is described gives some indication of a conflict. Their death comes in three phases. First they are "attacked", then they are "overpowered" and finally they are killed. Whether or not the two witnesses will use their powers against the antichrist is unknown, but the fact they had to be "overpowered" [to overcome their power] indicates a struggle. At this point their three and a half year appointed time of ministry will be complete. The fact it will be three and a half years is another example of what we discussed last week - God's plans are predetermined and exact and are never left to chance. Once they have completed their assignment God does not immediately bring them back to heaven. Instead He will allow them to be attacked and killed by the antichrist. On the surface this may seem unfair given the fact they will spend considerable time ministering to an ungrateful and hostile people. But couldn't the same thing be said about Jesus? He also came to Israel and witnessed to an ungrateful people in order to offer them redemption and eternal life, but instead of accepting His truth they killed Him. Yet, when you look at Christ's ministry from the aspect of His final blood atonement of sin, His death and resurrection makes perfect sense. So too with the two witnesses. As we will see later in this chapter their death will have a profound impact on Tribulation Jews.

8. "Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city — which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt — where also their Lord was crucified."

8.a. - "Their bodies will lie in the public square..."

In Jewish culture (in fact, in most cultures) refusing to bury a person's body is a sign of great disrespect. Particularly if the bodies are left in a public place for all to see. God commanded that even the body of a criminal was to be buried before sunset (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). We see the same lack of respect for Paul when the Jews stoned him at Lystra and then "...dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead...". Clear indication they had no intention of burying him (Acts 14:19). This is also why Joseph of Arimathea requested permission to remove the body of Christ from the cross in order to bury Him, even though he put himself at great risk. (John 19:38-40 / Matthew 27:59). In the case of the two witnesses the antichrist himself will kill them and leave their bodies in a public place. This will undoubtedly be seen as a great political coup for the antichrist because their death will temporarily show his power over God's messengers and bring relief to the people.

8.b. - "...of the great city — which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt — where also their Lord was crucified."

This verse makes it very clear where the two witnesses have been preaching. The "...great city...", "...where also their Lord was crucified...", is undoubtedly Jerusalem. Sadly, by this point Israel will be so sinful that God compares Jerusalem to Sodom and Egypt. Both were places of severe sin and wickedness, but both were also places where God sought to redeem a remnant of His people before bringing judgment on the remainder. Not only will the remaining Jews be disobedient but

we know from verse 2 that the wicked Gentile followers of the antichrist "...will trample on the holy city for 42 months."; Again, three and a half years. Yet despite their disobedience and rebellion God will send the two witnesses to offer final redemption.

9. "For three and a half days some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial."

9.a. - "For three and a half days..."

In our lesson on verses 1 and 2 we talked about the importance God places on quantifying what He does. This shows that nothing is left to chance because the plans of God are exact and predetermined. In this case the bodies of the two witnesses will lay unburied and in public sight for three and a half days.

9.b. - "...some from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial."

The term "...every people, tribe, language and nation..." is used several times in Revelation to designate the whole world, and in this case the enemies of God. From this we know the earth's population will not only know who the two witnesses are, but they will "...gaze..." (look) on them. Given today's technology they would be able to do this by television and satellite communication. This would also infer they will be filmed and probably broadcasts through the media. It also shows that the world, not just the antichrist, refuses to bury them. This text is very similar to the prophecy seen in the Psalms of Asaph, "O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. They have left the dead bodies of your servants as food for the birds of the sky, and flesh of your own people for the animals of the wild. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead." (Psalms 79:1-3). Although this psalm probably describes the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586BC (2 Kings 25:8-21), it is also a remarkable prophecy of the conditions seen in Jerusalem during the Tribulation. Ironically, Psalms 79 mentions the birds who will devour the unburied bodies, just as the two witnesses will be unburied, Jesus will have His vengeance over this sin. In Revelation 19 Jesus defeats the antichrist and his massive army. At the end of the battle "And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, or horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small." (Revelation 19:17-18).

10. "The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth."

10.a. - "The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts..."

Even more revealing of man's sinfully depraved condition is the fact they will gloat over the death of the two witnesses. Not only that, they will celebrate their death, through a world-wide party and gift giving. What an odd thing to consider doing at a time when the world is under such severe punishment and destruction. The vegetation is gone, oceans are turned to blood, rivers turned to poison and hundreds of millions of demons tormenting and killing man. Through all of this the death of two people results in a celebration across the earth. But why?

10.b. - "...because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth."

It's often said "The truth hurts". The two witnesses will preach redemption to Jerusalem. A city whose nationalist inhabitants still reject Jesus as the Messiah and by the trampling Gentiles who also inhabit the city. Their words of God's grace will be true, but they will be penetrating and tormenting to sinful man and punctuated by three and a half years of drought, worldwide plagues and by destroying anyone who seeks to harm them. This is similar to how Jesus will soon destroy all mankind who comes against Him. (Revelation 19:15 / 20:9). Mentally and physically those who reject the message brought by the two witnesses will be tormented.

11. "But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them."

Just as He did with Christ, God will raise the two witnesses to life. The breath of God will enter them, just as it did with the first Adam (Genesis 2:7), and He will raise them from the dead, just as He did with the second Adam, Jesus (Mark 16:6 / Romans 5:14-15 / 1 Corinthians 15:45-48). When this happens terror will strike the world.

12. "Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on."

Imagine the shock. Right in the middle of their celebration over the death of the two witnesses billions of sinful inhabitants on earth will watch as they are raised from the dead. Even more profound, they will hear the voice of God; a God they didn't think existed will call-out from the heavens and order the two witnesses to return to heaven. Verse 11 says terror struck them. Not only will be people of earth be terrified by what they see and hear, it is probable the antichrist, the false-prophet and maybe even satan will be horrified as they realize it is God himself who is in control. - Some would wonder why the two witnesses would not be allowed to continue preaching. At this point with the whole world watching their resurrection wouldn't their message be even stronger and accepted? Probably not. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus Jesus reminds us, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:31).

13. "At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."

13.a. - "At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed..."

Again, we see an indication of God's predetermined and exact timing as He knows the exact hour when these events will happen. As we've discussed, that means He is in total control of all actions and their timing. In this case a "severe" earthquake will hit the city. An earthquake sent by God as judgment upon the people who not only rejected the two witnesses, but continue to reject Jesus.

13.b. - "Seven thousand people were killed..."

The Bible doesn't say why 7,000 people were killed. In comparison it is a very small number compared to the billions already killed by God's judgment. Some commentators believe they may be officials or leaders of the antichrist's government. That is certainly possible but is not directly

substantiated by scripture. It could also be that the number seven indicates completion which could mean this is the final destruction before God's nation accepts Christ.

13.c.- "...and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."

In Romans 11 Paul said, "...Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved..." (Romans 11:25-26). Paul isn't saying that all Jews will be saved just because they are Jews. He is making a prophetic statement that until the last Gentile is saved Israel will continue to reject Christ and the cross. But there will be a point in the future when the remnant of Israel will come to an understanding of what the life, death and resurrection of Christ really means to them. As we now see, it will be at that point when the terror brought on by the death and resurrection of the two witnesses will strike Israel's remnant with the understanding that the death and resurrection of Jesus points to Him as their Messiah. The terror will be in part to the fact they finally understand, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Meggido." (At the death of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35:20-24 // (Zechariah 12:10-11).

The remnant of Israel will now turn to God and give Him glory. After centuries of disobedience, punctuated by the death of their rejected Messiah, Israel will finally turn to God has their hope and accept Him as their Savior. "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." (Zechariah 13:1 / Jeremiah 31:31).

14. "The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon."

In chapter 8 John says, "As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe! to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the three angels." (Revelation 8:13). The first Woe, the fifth Trumpet, was the release of millions of demons from the abyss who would torment man for five months (Revelation 9:1-12). The second Woe, the sixth Trumpet, started with the release of four demon angels near the river Euphrates who will command an army of 200 million set on destroying one-third of mankind, and ended with the terror-inducing resurrection of the two witnesses (Revelation 9:13-11:14). The third and final Woe will now come with the seventh and final Trumpet. This event will begin to draw to a close the Tribulation period. Now that Israel's remnant is obedient to God (and the true enemy of the antichrist), the seventh Trumpet will soon usher in the final destructive judgments of God, the total destruction of lost mankind and the antichrist, and the start of Christ's millennial reign. We will begin to discuss this transition next week beginning with verse 15, which will take us through chapter 20.

Hang on. Now, we start the second half of Revelation. Read, hear, take to heart and be blessed. (Revelation 1:3).

LESSON 54

Revelation, chapter 11:15-19

Now that we have completed the first half of Revelation and we have experienced first-hand the blessings Jesus promised in verse 1:3. We have read, we have heard, we have taken to heart, and now we are seeing the blessing and joy of our understanding.

Now, with verse 11:15 we enter the second half of this amazing book and immediately hear the blowing of the seventh and final Trumpet judgment. An event that will not show its effects until chapters 15 and 16. Between 11 and 15 are three amazing chapters that may seem out of place but are actually placed there to provide more detail about several characters and events who have been active throughout the Tribulation. These details help us form a more defined picture in our minds of the Tribulation environment before we see the final impact of the seven rapid-fire Bowl judgments. Since these chapters come between the Trumpet blast and its Trumpet judgment I decided to provide a quick overview of chapters 12-15. Now with that high-level context in mind we can go back and deep-dive the remainder of chapter 11 before we begin our study of chapter 12. This may all seem a little confusing, but bear with me. It will make sense.

Chapter 11:15-19

In verses 11-14 of chapter 11 we saw an amazing event occur --- the remnant nation of Israel will finally recognize Jesus as their Messiah King as they "...gave glory to the God of heaven...". This event completed the second woe first described in 8:13, and is clear fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 12:10 - 13:1 which speaks of Israel recognizing Jesus as, "...the one they have pierced..." (Zechariah 12:10). It also reflects the outcome of Paul's prophecy that, "...all Israel will be saved..." (Romans 11:26). As we've discussed, this doesn't mean all Jews will be saved just because they're Jews. It means there will be a time during the Tribulation (possibly immediately after the temple's abomination, but certainly once the two witnesses have ascended) when the remaining Jews will recognize Jesus as their Messiah. Interestingly, in Romans 11:25 Paul says this will not occur, "...until the full number of Gentiles has come in...". This indicates a time when no more Gentiles on earth will accept redemption through Christ so they can spiritually enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:20 / John 3:5). This is the bittersweet time John was warned about when he ate the little scroll that tasted sweet but soured in his stomach. (Revelation 10:9-11).

Now in verse 15 the seventh angel sounds his final Trumpet. This will release the seven "Bowl" judgments in chapters 15 and 16 that in the final weeks or months of the Tribulation period will pour God's final wrath upon the earth.

15. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever." 16. And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17. saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. 18. The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small—and for destroying those who destroy the earth." 19. Then God's temple in

heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm."

Now let's unpack this wonderful text...

15. "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever.'"

15.a - "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet..."

In chapter 8 we saw an angel in heaven throw a fiery censer to earth lit with coals from the altar of God (Revelation 8:5). This released seven angels who were given a special assignment to blow devastating Trumpet blasts of judgment upon the earth. Now in 11:15 the seventh and final Trumpet will sound, alerting us to a series of destructive powers we will not fully understand until chapter 16.

15.b - "...and there were loud voices in heaven..."

Instead of immediately seeing the results of the seventh Trumpet and the Bowl judgments it will release, we see praise in heaven from "...loud voices..." celebrating the outcome they know will be the result. We don't know who these speakers are but several times in Revelation we've heard similar voices from heaven:

- The voice of Jesus (Revelation 1:8).
- The Four Living Creatures saying praise day and night (Revelation 4:8).
- Twenty Four Elders (arguably the raptured church) laying down their crowns and praising Jesus (Revelation 4:11 / 5:9 / 7:11).
- "...the voice of many angels..." encircling the throne and saying praises to the Worthy Lamb (Revelation 5:12).
- The Four Living Creatures who at the opening of each judgment seal would "...say in a voice like thunder, 'Come!'" (Revelation 6:1).
- The martyrs under the altar (probably Tribulation saints killed for their faith) who at the fifth Seal called out for vengeance "...in a loud voice..." (Revelation 6:9).
- The angel from the east announcing "...in a loud voice..." the 144,000 converted Jews (Revelation 7:2).
- The multitude of Tribulation saints from every people group who "...cried out in a loud voice..." to declare their salvation (Revelation 7:10).
- The mighty angel announcing Christ's soon return with "...a loud shout like the roar of a lion..." (Revelation 10:3).
- The two witnesses who were resurrected to life by "...a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here'" (Revelation 11:12).

Now in verse 15 there are other "...loud voices in heaven..." declaring praise for the coming kingdom of God. But interestingly, the events highlighted by their praise will not have occurred by this point. Those in heaven saying the praises know what is about to happen and begin to celebrate the events well ahead of time. I can only imagine the excitement that will be building in heaven when we realize Jesus the Warrior is preparing to return and we will be preparing to return with Him. - That is so cool.

15.c. - "...which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign for ever and ever."

Here we see two diametrically opposed kingdom views - the "...kingdom of the world..." and the "...kingdom of our Lord...". One controlled by satan and the other controlled by God. The Second Coming of Jesus, which ushers in our Lord's thousand year Millennial Kingdom, occurs in 19:11, but here the inhabitants of heaven (which will by then include us, the raptured church) aren't waiting until the actual events take place. They are already giving praise for what they know is coming - the kingdom of our Lord after the Tribulation. Interestingly we have all prayed for this exact same event and may not have even realized it. In Luke 11:1 (Matthew 6:9-13 - 7:11) the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Unbeknownst to them, the prayer they were taught included the prophetic events that will happen in Revelation chapter 20. Within His prayer Jesus said of God, "...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." (Matthew 6:10). Clearly, God's kingdom has not yet come to earth, nor is His will done on earth like it is in heaven. Instead, the "...kingdom of the world..." is so influenced by "...the prince of this world..." (John 12:31 / 14:30); the "...god of this age...", who has "...so blinded the minds of unbelievers..." (2 Corinthians 4:4) that God's will is rarely done (Psalms 2:2 / Acts 4:25-26). In fact, at the time these praises are being offered to God the world will be at its most disobedient state as "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast..." (Revelation 13:8), and the kingdom he rules. Yet, as we will see, by this point in the Tribulation disobedience will be tolerated no more. In Revelation 20 Jesus is ready to establish His thousand year reign and rule as our King over His kingdom. (Revelation 20:6). So here in Revelation 11 we who are in heaven will not wait until Christ's return to praise Him. We will praise Him with the faithful anticipation of knowing it is about to happen -- when the world becomes His kingdom, "...and He will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 22:5). This will be the eventual outcome of the Lord's prayer we have prayed so many times - "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:10 KJV)

"Amen, come Lord Jesus." (Revelation 11:15 / 22:20).

16. "And the Twenty-Four Elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God..."

We first saw the Twenty-Four Elders in chapter 4 "...dressed in white and had crowns on their heads." (4:4). In an earlier lesson, I explained why I feel these elders represent the raptured church. That's certainly debatable but it's where my heart lands. Since we're going to see them mentioned several more times in our study it might be a good idea to go back and review that lesson and the other lessons on chapters 4 and 5 related to the Twenty-Four Elders. There we saw them offering praise (Revelation 4:11 / 5:9), just as they do here, prostrate before God as they worship Him and as they highlight events that are about to come.

17. "...saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign."

17.a. - "...saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was..."

In their praise the Twenty-Four Elders give thanks to God. Possibly for the fact they are the redeemed and raptured believers from earth who are now anticipating the end of sin and the restoration of Christ's kingdom. In doing so they recognize God for His eternal presence. This is

similar to what Jesus said in chapter 1 when He refers to Himself as, "...the Alpha and Omega, says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8). Then in chapter 4 where we see God on His throne described as, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is and is to come." (Revelation 4:8). This clarifies that God is all things for all times. He not only controlled all things in the past and maintains sovereignty of all things today, but He has already authorized all things in the future as well. It is He who will, "...make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come...". (Isaiah 46:10). This signifies God's total and absolute supreme authority over all things, including things that have not yet occurred. It is God the Father, His Spirit and Jesus the Messiah to whom they bow with anticipation of He "...who is and who was...", and who is now ready to show the world what is to come.

17.b. - "...because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign."

It's interesting that Tribulation man will see such destructive power from God yet fail to grasp that redemption is being offered. We saw this in Revelation 6:15-17 when both the mighty and the weak recognized their suffering came from, "...him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" but chose to turn their backs on His offer of grace. This level of disobedience shows the power Satan has over man's heart. A defiance we will see grow ever stronger as we work through the rest of Revelation.

But here verse 17 already speaks of the Lord's reign as if it has already begun. This is because the revelers eagerly anticipate the final destruction of sin by Christ and His thousand-year reign --- even though that doesn't occur until chapters 19 and 20. Although that event is in the future the residents of heaven are already well aware of what is about to happen. They know the armies of the world will come against God in a last-ditch satanically-driven war at the Plains of Megiddo -- - a place we know as Armageddon (Revelation 16:16). A place where Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 7). A place Napoleon said was the greatest battlefield he had ever seen. It is here, and again at the end of the millennial reign, when Christ will show His great and mighty power as He destroys the army of man and calls the birds of the earth to feed on their flesh (Revelation 19:17-18). It is here, "They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers." [That's us!] (Revelation 17:14). But prior to all of this occurring, we will be praising in heaven and celebrating His victory.

18. "The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small—and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

18.a. - "The nations were angry, and your wrath has come..."

In chapter 6 the people on earth were terrified by God's powerful judgment (Revelation 6:15-17), but now, near the end of the Tribulation mankind will have become as sinful as they will ever be. They will worship the beast (Revelation 13:14), identify themselves with his mark (Revelation 13:16-18), blaspheme God with every breath (Revelation 16:10-11), and gather nations as they prepare for war (Revelation 16:16). In response Jesus will release a series of Bowl judgments that will bring horrific destruction on man and his environment. But sadly, man's Satan-induced disillusion will no longer allow them to return to God for grace and redemption.

18.b. - "The time has come for judging the dead,..."

Every destructive action of God is a judgment, but the time of final judging all of the unbelieving dead will come after the Tribulation and the thousand-year millennial reign. It is then Jesus will conduct the great white throne judgment and cast all unbelievers into hell (Revelation 20:11-15). As with the other parts of this passage the host of heaven praise the anticipated outcome of God's judgment before it happens.

18.c. - "...and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small..."

But God's people will be rewarded. The reward of the saints is a common theme for those who are obedient. Our reward will come at the rapture when we are taken by Jesus to be with Him forever, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 4:16 / 5:9 / 1 Corinthians 15:51). But our rewards will continue, when we are enabled to ride with Jesus when as the Warrior King, "The armies of heaven were following Him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen...", (Revelation 19:11-14), when we reign with Him in His kingdom (Revelation 20:4), when we, the raptured church become the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7-9), and when we "...will see His face.." and will serve Him as He reigns for ever and ever (Revelation 22:4-6).

18.d. - "...—and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

God's original creation was perfect, including the garden in which He placed a perfect couple. But sin's temptation lured them into disobedience, and from then until the last person rejects the redemption of God, man's sin has destroyed all that God had made perfect.

19. "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm."

In chapters 4 and 5 we had our first view into God's throne room, with its holy place and altar (Revelation 6:9 / 8:3). Here, heaven is revealed and we see God's covenant promise. The place where God brought atonement to earth (Exodus 25), the veil that was torn at the final divine sacrificial offering of Jesus (Matthew 27:51 / Hebrews 10:20), the covenant promise between God and man that redemption was offered through Christ Jesus. But we also see the judgment mood of God illustrated by lighting, rumblings and peals of thunder. Here, in a moment of great exaltation, as the residents of heaven praise the coming activities of Jesus, we are reminded that there is judgment yet to come.

To some it might seem odd that those in heaven (which will include us by then) will sing praises to Jesus and celebrate His victory before it happens. But is that really so odd? As students of Revelation we already know how this will end. We know Jesus will return as the Mighty Warrior and Judge, we know He will defeat satan and all who follow him, we know He will establish a thousand-year millennial reign, and we know He will then re-create a new heaven, a new earth and a new Jerusalem for His believing children --- for us --- to dwell with Him for eternity. This understanding allows us to praise these future events now just as the revelers will do in chapter 11 -- because like them, we know our King will be victorious.

So let's add this to our list of things to thank God for every day. Things that have not yet occurred, but we know they will.

LESSON 55

Revelation, Chapter 12, verses 1-2

Between 11 and 15 are three chapters that provide additional details about characters and events that will occur during the Tribulation. Now with that quick overview as context let's go back and continue with a more detailed study of chapters 12-14.

Let's read chapter 12.

1. "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter". And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. 7. Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. 10. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 12. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." 13. When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. 15. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring — those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus."

What an amazing passage of scripture. On the surface it can be very confusing, but as we dig deeper, its rich imagery will help us understand its meaning. That said, chapter 12 can be a challenge to teach. Not because it's overly complicated, but because it's overly comprehensive. In just 17 verses chapter 12 provides the history of Israel from its inception through the end of the Tribulation. It also provides fascinating details about satan and his insatiable desire to destroy Israel and remove her as a key component of God's ultimate plan for mankind.

Chapter 12 reminds us that the seven-year period of time described in the book of Revelation -- the "Tribulation" -- is primarily focused on Israel and God's redemption of the Jewish people. This is the period Jeremiah called "...a time of trouble for Jacob..." (Jeremiah 30:7). The implication here is that Jacob, whose name was changed by God to "Israel", was the father of twelve sons, who became the namesake of twelve tribes, and who would become the progenitors of the Hebrew nation of Israel. Certainly, billions of unbelieving Gentiles will be on earth during the Tribulation period, but God's primary focus will be on Israel as He provides more opportunities for His disobedient chosen people to finally accept Christ as their Messianic-King. We see this in the prophecy to Daniel, when Gabriel revealed that a period of seventy-seven-year periods of time would be set aside for Israel leading up to the time when the Messiah would come, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city..." (Daniel. 9:24). Obviously, when speaking to Daniel, who was a Jew, "...your people..." must refer to the Jewish people, and "...your holy city..." must refer the Jerusalem. Gabriel expands on this in verse 25, "Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens" and sixty-two "sevens"..." As we've previously studied sixty nine of the seventy time periods have already occurred. This leaves one future seven-year period -- the Tribulation ("The Seventeenth Week of Daniel"), -- when God will provide Israel one last opportunity to come to Christ.

The reason I stress this point about Israel is because there is an emerging theology called the "Replacement Theory". This is the idea that the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people. Sadly, this theory is being pushed by a number of evangelical pastors even though there is no scriptural support for their position. In fact, to me the Replacement Theory is heretical because it ignores the obvious importance God still places on Israel and the Jewish people.

A review of this importance includes:

- The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) when God promised, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you..."
- The Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19:5-7), "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession." Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."
- The Land Covenant (Genesis 15:18-21), "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river Euphrates... --- This is the same area we see so much about in the media today.
- The Davidic Covenant, (2 Samuel 7:12-13), "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." --- And when will we see this throne again? The throne from which Jesus will reign during the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20:6).
- The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31 / Matthew 26:28), "The days are coming", declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah." // "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin."
- Israel is the only nation through which God chose to enact His sacrificial system and Levitical law.

- Israel are the people whom God chose to write divinely-inspired scripture as "...they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.", because it was, "First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God." (2 Peter 1:21 / Romans 3:2)
- It is through Israel that the gospel of salvation was preached because "...salvation is from the Jews..." / "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, is a son of Abraham." (John 4:22 / Luke 19:9)
- Israel was the nation God chose to bring forth the Son of God as the Son of Man. Who came initially for "...the lost sheep of Israel..." (Matthew 15:24).
- And Israel was set aside like no other, "...the people of Israel. This is the adoption of sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. (Romans 9:4-5).
- And it is the Jews who during the Tribulation will finally "...were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." (Revelation 11:13), as they "...look on the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:10).
- Why? Because Jesus will provide forgiveness to "...the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. (Zechariah 13:1).

Why is it so important to understand the role Israel plays in God's plan? Because the "Replacement Theory" is another one of the enemy's schemes to destroy Israel. At a time when Israel is flourishing, and the olive tree is budding, satan realizes he is losing the battle on the ground. So he'll take the battle to our philosophy, to our politics and even to our religion to convince the world that Israel is not important. He'll do this by even convincing the church that we have somehow supplanted Israel as God's chosen instrument. What is so confusing to me about the Replacement Theory is how could a pastor read the book of Revelation and somehow come away from the fact that Israel will not be the targeted focus of God? It is from them He will select 144,000 JEWS, and it is from them He will select the Two Witnesses, and after judgment when God creates a new heaven and a new earth, guess what else He creates? -- a New Jerusalem, "...the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." (Revelation 21:10). It's critically important for us to understand Israel's role in end-times prophecy, but also in modern day politics. As Christians we must recognize and support Israel for what she is - the chosen people of God.

As we journey through Revelation it should have become clear that Israel is the main focus of both God and satan -- God to redeem them and satan to destroy them. By the time the Tribulation starts the church will have already been raptured, leaving the seventieth and final seven-year period of time ("...of Daniel...") for tribulation and punishment of the unbelieving world. This will include Israel, who are left to accept or reject God's final-offered grace or suffer His wrath for eternity. Yet throughout the seven-year tribulational punishment God will continue to offer grace to all, with a special emphasis on bringing His chosen people Israel to Christ (John 3:17, Romans 11:25-26, Revelation 11:13). Clearly, God chose Israel to be His messenger to the world. He set them apart and prepared them to carry His story of atonement through the sacrifice of the unblemished Lamb. But Israel went through cycle after cycle of obedience and disobedience; to the point that when the true Lamb came to claim His flock they did not even hear His call. Today they remain disobedient and will continue to do so until the time they finally understand who He is.

The first five verses of chapter 12 provide an abbreviated history of Israel, from her inception, through her pain of Messianic waiting, to the first coming of the unrecognized Christ, and to His death, resurrection and ascension. Her pain, which exists to this day, will not subside until she, as

a people, recognize her Messiah as their King during the Tribulation. This is a continuous story from the time of God's covenant with Abram, to the first advent of Christ and His focus on the "...lost sheep of Israel..." (Matthew 10:6 / 15:24 / Jeremiah 50:6). But sadly, Israel as a people did not (still do not) recognize the poor, humble man Jesus as their divine King. Because of their continued disobedience the seven-year "...time of trouble..." will be a terrible time for Israel. The antichrist will come to power, he will break his false treaty with them, abominate their new temple, declare himself to be their god, trample Jerusalem and set his sights on destroying all Jews and all believers (Revelation 11:2 / 12:4 / 13:7). Yet as we saw in chapter 11 verse 13 it is during the Tribulation when Israel will finally accept Christ as her Messianic Savior. From then on, she becomes the prime target of satan as he seeks to destroy the remaining people of God.

And with that context let's focus on verses 1 and 2.

1. "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head."

1.a. - "A great sign in heaven..."

This is the first of seven "signs" in the last half of Revelation:

- 12:1 - The woman
- 12:3 - The red dragon (satan)
- 13:13 - The false-prophet
- 13:14 - The beast (antichrist)
- 15:1 - Seven angels and seven Bowls
- 16:14 - Demonic signs to deceive the world
- 19:20 - Signs of the false-prophet

These "signs" bring our attention to key characters or events as they draw our attention to a particular thing or activity so we can better understand its meaning. A simple example of this would be a road sign. Without it you would not know which road you're on or what direction you're headed. In this case it is a "...great..." sign, which indicates something special to help us understand the text through the image given to us by God.

1.b. - "...a woman..."

There are several opinions of who the woman in this verse is. Some believe she is Mary, the earthly mother of God. But despite the important role Mary played in the life of Christ there is no scripture that would indicate she has a role in the Tribulation period. I believe the Woman is Israel; the nation and its people. As we've discussed, Israel has prominence in God's divine plan. She is the nation through which Jesus was brought into the world, and she is the preeminent target of satan's destruction. From the fall of man, Jesus, "...her seed...", the offspring of Israel, has been in conflict with satan. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers..." (Genesis 3:15). The final stages of this conflict is the actions and events we see in the Tribulation. From the actions of satan, the antichrist and the false-prophet as they oppose Jesus who will ultimately be victorious as the Warrior King. Other times Israel is symbolically referred to as the wife of God; sometimes obedient and sometimes unfaithful,

- "For your Maker is your husband - the Lord Almighty is his name - the Holy One of Israel is your redeemer." (Isaiah 54:5).
- "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you - one from a town and two from a clan - and bring you to Zion." (Jeremiah 3:14).

- "You adulteress wife! You prefer strangers to your husband!" (Ezekiel 16:32).

This is not a husband-wife relationship in an earthly sense, but represents God's love for His chosen people, His pursuit of their love, His care, defense, well-being, protection and provision. It is similar to the relationship between Christ and the church (more broadly, all believers), which is referred to as "...the bride of Christ..." (Revelation 19:7 / 2 Corinthians 11:2 / Ephesians 5:22-23). Understanding the role of Israel as the woman will become even more clear as we go deeper into this chapter.

1.c. - "...clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet..."

In the Old Testament Joseph is seen as a picture of Christ. He was one of the twelve sons of Jacob, and as such a progenitor of the twelve tribes and the covenant people. His brothers (his own people) turned their backs on him, sold him into slavery and dipped his robe in blood. Even so, he arose to power and forgave his people. It was through Joseph the Hebrew people prospered and grew in Egypt, and upon their exodus would become the people of Israel. Of course, that's an oversimplification of the story but I think you can see the connection with the story of Jesus as it relates to Israel. In Genesis chapter 37 Joseph describes one of his unusual dreams. In his dream Joseph said "...the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." (Genesis 37:9). His brothers were angry but his father Jacob "...kept the matter in mind." He was not sure what it meant but he did not reject it as his sons had. An indication that the story has a deeper meaning.

The meaning of the sun and the moon is debatable. Both may indicate the light God intended to come from Israel as His representative testimony. It may also indicate Israel's prominent role in God's overall creation. Some believe the Sun represents glory and dignity, while the moon may be related to ancient Israelite new moon celebrations (Psalms 81:3 / Ezra 3:5 / 2 Chronicles 2:4). Others believe the moon may represent the Gentile nations who rank below Israel in God's national plan. We see an indication of this in the prophesy of Zechariah, "This is what the Lord Almighty says, "in those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, "Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you." (Zechariah 8:23 / Joel 3:18). In either case, the description of Israel clothed in the sun and moon paints a beautiful picture of her radiant existence -- a radiance we are seeing today as Israel as a nation grows stronger and more prosperous. This reflects the words of Christ in the Olivet Discourse, - "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree [Israel]: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door." (Matthew 24:32-33). The emergence of Israel as a strong and prospering nation is a clear sign of the end-times.

1.d. - "...and a crown of twelve stars on her head."

Less debatable is the crown of twelve stars which represent the twelve tribes of Israel and further clarifies the reality of who the woman is. In today's Jewish culture it is not as important as it once was to align with your tribe. But as we've already seen in Revelation it is important to God. In chapter 7 we saw the 144,000 converted Jewish evangelists, "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." (Revelation 7:4), and in chapter 11 we see the Two Witnesses, who as "...the two olive trees and the two lampstands..."; are related to the prophecy of Joshua and Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4). These two men, part of the twelve tribes, will

preach in Jerusalem during the Tribulation. Clearly, in this text God is speaking of the woman as Israel.

2. "She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth."

When man first sinned God covered his iniquity with the blood of an innocent sacrifice. (Genesis 3:21). From this example God commanded that a blood sacrifice would be required for the atonement of all sin. This practice was institutionalized as early as the time of Able who understood that his offering to God must be the firstborn of his flock (Genesis 4:4). His obedience separated him from the works-based offering of his brother Cain. A practice that sadly exists to this day in many areas of the church. Abraham understood God would provide a sacrificial lamb through the testing of his faith and the assurance he had that God would provide a lamb (Genesis 22:8). Likewise, God illustrated this principle again when He commanded the Hebrew exiles in Egypt to paint the blood of a spotless lamb on the door-posts of their house, to avoid God's imminent judgment (Exodus 12:7). As Israel matured as a nation God instituted burnt offerings and a blood sacrifice as the atonement for sin (Leviticus 4). Then after generations of disobedience Jesus came, as "...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Since her inception as a nation Israel has been God's intended messenger to the world and as the portal through which God would rise on earth as the Messianic Son of Man. But generation after generation of obedience and disobedience resulted in cycles of reward and punishment. Because Israel did not recognize Christ for who He is, even to this day, they have gone through thousands of years of pain as they wait for the child's birth. It was an avoidable pain that could have been healed by obedience, but instead the pain continues and will do so until the Tribulation when their remnant will finally recognize Jesus and be saved.

LESSON 56

Revelation, Chapter 12, Verse 3

Quick Recap:

In verses 1 and 2 we saw a sign from God; a woman, the nation of Israel, the symbolic wife of God and the vessel through which Jesus came to earth. We also talked about the importance of understanding Israel's preeminent role in God's divine plan. It is through Israel that God brought forth His message of salvation to the world. First, through the Messianic promise of a sacrificial offering, and then through the physical manifestation of God's atoning grace through the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Yet, through all this time Israel has remained largely disobedient. A condition that will change during the Tribulation when the remnant of God's chosen people will finally recognize who Jesus is and "...gave glory to the God of heaven.", as they, "...look on the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child..." (Revelation 11:13 / Zechariah 12:10).

Today, maybe more than at any other time in history, it is critical for Christians to clearly understand the role of Israel in God's plan. Not only in the Biblical past, but in the prophetic future of God's actions to re-establish His supreme rule over all creation. God's promise to "...bless those who bless you [Israel], and whoever curses you I will curse;..." (Genesis 12:3), is as true today as it was when God said it to Abram. Based on that promise, we as Americans, and specifically as believers, need to clearly understand the severe consequences of our failure to support Israel as a people and as a nation. Some would contend that God has turned away from Israel and given the mantle of messaging to the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. The role of Israel in God's plan is solid. We see that in the fact His rebuilt creation will include a New Jerusalem; a holy city for all eternity. A city that "...does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its light." (Revelation 21:23). That city, is the holy city of God (Daniel 9:24) and the place of God's forever throne (2 Samuel 7:10-16).

Background:

Now in verse 3 we will discuss Israel's greatest enemy - satan - who has for thousands of years sought to destroy God's plan by destroying His chosen messengers. He does this because he understands the critical role Israel plays in God's plan for mankind's salvation. He believes if he can destroy Israel, he will destroy their Messianic role and its gospel message. He does this largely through the disobedience of man and the temptation of sin. If satan can deceive man enough to make him sin against God then he will have weakened God's plan to bring man to righteousness. And, if he can also influence Israel to turn away from God -- as he has done so many times -- then God's plan will be further compromised.

Since the time of his original fall from grace satan has been the single source of sin's influence on mankind.

- It was his deception that resulted in the initial fall of man,
- he orchestrated the murder of Abel by Cain and the delineation of obedience and disobedience,
- he influenced man's sin to the point the flood was required,
- he was the sinful impatience of Abraham,

- The sinful choice of Lot,
- The debauchery of Sodom,
- The disobedience in the wilderness,
- The golden-calf tolerance of Aaron'
- The pharaoh who ordered to death all of Hebrew boys,
- The rock-striking sin of Moses,
- The lustful failure of David,
- The ideology of Solomon,
- The defeat of Israel by conquering armies,
- The defeat of Israel by their own idolatry,
- Israel's desire for a human king,
- The long cycle of disobedient kings,
- The loss of the Law and forfeit the ark,
- The rejection of the prophets,
- The wickedness of the Pharisees,
- he influenced Herod to kill the male children of Bethlehem,
- he placed Peter between Jesus and the cross,
- he entered the betraying Judas,
- he filled hearts with the cry of Israel to "Crucify Him! Crucify Him",
- he directed the destruction of Jerusalem by his puppet, the Roman Empire,
- he has influenced man into idolatry, paganism, false religion, ceremonies and rituals, watered-down Christianity, prosperity gospel and works-based salvation.
- Even today he sways the minds of believers with confusion through heresies such as Replacement Theology that doesn't deny the existence of Israel, but denies their relevance to God's plan. So sad.

The common thread in all of this is satan's insatiable hatred of God, His people and His plans. he will seek to destroy Israel in any way he can, but most often through his influence to turn them away from God. Every disobedient action and sinful thought of man - Jew or Gentile - is the result of satan's evil influence as he chips away at man's role in God's plan. And at the core of all this is his quenchless thirst to destroy God's people --- which first and foremost includes the destruction of Israel --- the chosen messenger and the vessel through whom Jesus was born.

But, the empty tomb was his downfall and the Mighty Warrior will be his destruction. Everything he has done to prevent Israel from maturing as a nation, to prevent Christ from being born a Jew, and then to prevent Christ from living as God on earth could not prevent Jesus from His victorious resurrection and taking His place at the right hand of the Father. During the Tribulation satan will unleash evil as he never has done before, but in the end he will be unable to destroy the woman or to prevent Christ from returning and taking back what is rightfully His. That is what we will see in chapters 12 through 14.

And with that context let's unpack verse 3.

3. "Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads."

3.a. - "Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon...."

The woman's pursuer is satan, the second sign, here known as "the red dragon"; a name used to describe him thirteen times in the book of Revelation. Even though the Bible is clear about who the dragon is, there have been other opinions over time. Some contend this may be in reference to a future Islamic caliphate bent on destroying Israel. Or, maybe it's the nation of China, because they could muster the army of two hundred million soldiers in chapter 9, under their national banner of a red dragon. Or, maybe it's symbolic of the Christ-rejecting world who is in general conflict with Israel. But the Bible clearly dispels these and other theories by telling us exactly who the red dragon is, "The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan who leads the whole world astray." (Revelation 12:9). This is the serpent in the garden, who in the last days is symbolized as a dragon for his great and evil power. He will carry that moniker until the very end when a powerful angel from heaven "...seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or satan, and bound him for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:2). From these descriptions there is no doubt who the red dragon is. he is satan, on his quest to destroy Israel, and through her to destroy God's plans for mankind's redemption. In fact, given the overall Revelation story and satan's desire to gain control of the world, it could be no one else. It's important for us to understand this because the personage of the red dragon should not be brushed off as some type of cartoonish symbolism or Halloween costume. This is satan, who seeks to supplant God as creations' sole ruler. He is evil personified and doesn't need to be interpreted as anything different. As one commentator puts it, "...the great red dragon is all about wickedness and ultimately his own defeat. It is a serious miscalculation to laugh, scorn, or dismiss the imagery of the great red dragon as ghoulish foolishness...".

We don't know exactly when lucifer fell from prominence but it was certainly before his encounter with Adam and Eve (Isaiah 14:12-15 / Ezekiel 28:12-17 / Luke 10:18). Since that time his grand plan has been to create an evil trinity by replacing God the Father with himself, Jesus with the antichrist and the Holy Spirit with the false-prophet. But something stands in his way -- Jesus, His chosen nation and His body of believers. That's why satan's focus has been to distract and disillusion God's followers. From the day he fell from his angelic position (Isaiah 14:12 / Ezekiel 28:12-17), until the time he is destroyed by Jesus (Revelation 20:10), satan has and will make every effort to destroy Israel as the source of the seed of the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). The seed that will eventually "...crush your head...". Until that happens he will continue his pursuit until the end, when the believing remnant of Israel will be protected by God and satan's wrath will turn upon all other believers (Revelation 12:6 / Matthew 24:16).

3.b. - "...with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads."

This same imagery is seen in chapter 13, but there applied to the scarlet beast; the antichrist, "The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each a blasphemous name." (Revelation 13:1). This describes the antichrist, who during the Tribulation will be completely under the control of the dragon and therefore takes on his characteristics. These are not physical characteristics, but as we will see they symbolize the evil empire of satan, manifesting itself in the

world-controlling kingdom of the antichrist. This is confirmed in chapter 17, "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." (Revelation 17:9-11). Here in very complex imagery John describes the seven heads as seven hills. This has led some scholars to believe the seven heads represent the seven hills on which Rome is built. But we must note that John clarifies for us that understanding this passage "...calls for a mind with wisdom." (Revelation 17:9). In other words, the meaning of this passage is not as straight-forward as it might appear so we need to apply spiritual wisdom in order to understand it. Or said another way, simply interpreting the seven hills as the seven hills of Rome is just too easy because that answer wouldn't take spiritual wisdom to figure it out. As we see in 17:9, the seven hills refer to seven kings, the heads of seven empires who over the centuries have sought to destroy Israel. These are not the only kingdoms who warred with Israel over time, but they are the most powerful of the ancient empires who sought to control the world of their day. More importantly, based on scripture, they were obviously part of satan's plan to annihilate Israel.

Many nations have sought to destroy Israel. For example, Jerusalem, her ancient capital, has been besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, recaptured 44 times and destroyed twice. But through all of this there have been six ancient and significant empires whose armies sought to wipe out the Hebrew people. Why? Because ever since his expulsion from heaven, satan's focus has been on revenge through the destruction of God's plan, defeat of God's Son and disillusion of God's chosen nation through which the Messiah would come to earth. But after satan failed to achieve that goal, he sought (still seeks) to destroy Israel by influencing them to turn away from God so they would not be the source of God's redemptive gospel message to the world. A message that today is largely carried by the church, but as we will see, that in itself does not change God's future plans for Israel as His chosen people.

Of all the nations and kingdoms satan has used to persecute Israel most conservative Revelation scholars believe the ones who represent the dragon's seven heads and crowns include: 1. Egypt, 2. Assyria, 3. Babylon, 4. Medo-Persia, 5. Greece, and 6. Rome. That leaves the seventh head, which as we will see, also becomes the eighth head. This is clarified in 17:10 where John tells us the seven hills, "...are also seven kings...".

Of which:

- "...Five have fallen..." --- these would have been five warring nations that were already destroyed prior to John's time --- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece.
- "...one is..." --- John is now speaking in the present tense because when he wrote this chapter Rome was still in power.
- The five who had already fallen plus the one who "is" equals six. This leaves one future seventh empire.
- The seventh is "...the other has not yet come...". This indicates a future kingdom. - Some contend the seventh empire was Nazi Germany. This is understandable considering the obvious demonic actions of Hitler. Others believe it could be a future islamic caliphate; a confederation of muslim nations focused on destroying Israel. This is also conceivable given the fact several nations and multiple radical islamic terrorist groups have avowed to destroy Israel. But the Bible seems to dispel both of these notions with the next part of the verse, --

"...the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction."

Let's break this down a bit:

- "...the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while." - So who is "he"? This verse seems to speak of a person, not an empire, but it also speaks of him as a king, who is the head of an empire. A king who is only on the scene for a short period of time.
- This is clarified by the next part of the passage, "The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." The beast is the antichrist, who through the dragon's power becomes "...the other has not yet come...". The future leader of a satan-controlled world empire and false religion who will become the arch enemy of God, Israel and all believers. He "...belongs to the seven...", which means he is one of the seven empire heads, but he will also be the eighth king. How? Because it appears from scripture the antichrist will come on the scene at the beginning of the Tribulation (the white horse and rider in Revelation 6:2). He will then build his evil power base and control the world, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast..." (Revelation 13:8). But at some point he will be mortally wounded and appear to die. He will then appear to come back to life, further convincing the lost world he is a divine being and worthy of praise. "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast." (Revelation 13:3). "The beast [antichrist], which you saw, once was, [past tense] now is not, [was gone] and yet will come up [appear to recover] out of the abyss...". (Revelation 17:8). There are a number of interpretations for this verse but many scholars believe this apparent death and resurrection is how the antichrist appears to die and come back to life. And when he does he will be, "... an eighth king." He is the one who has not yet come (speaking of the future), but when he does he will "...remain for a little while...". This short period of time speaks of the Tribulation, which is only seven years, and at the height of his reign lasts three and a half years. Sadly, the world who would not accept the true death and resurrection of Christ will now accept the false death and resurrection of the antichrist. "He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people." (Daniel 8:24).
- But his power will come to an end when he "...is going to his destruction." As we'll see in chapter 19 his destruction comes when Jesus returns as the Warrior King and destroys the antichrist and his followers, "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and His army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false-prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf."..."The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur." (Revelation 19:19-20). -- At this point, the seventh king "...who once was..." and the eighth king he will become are destroyed forever.

3.c. - "...and ten horns..."

Here the imagery is similar to that of the seven heads. Most commentators believe the ten horns (horns represent power in the Bible) are ten nations or ten divisions of the antichrist's empire who will fight against Jesus in Revelation 19. We see another indication of this in Daniel 7, where he speaks of ten horns and ten kings. Daniel sees these in a vision of the antichrist who will, "...speak

against the Most High and oppress the saints and try to change the set times and the law. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times, and half a time." (Daniel 7:24-25). Clearly, the terminology used here indicates the last half of the Tribulation when the antichrist and his army of nations are at their most powerful. These are the kings referred to in Revelation 19 who come to battle against Jesus. Many Revelation scholars believe the antichrist's infrastructure will arise from the nations of Europe, an area many historians link to ten ancient people-groups who became Europeans. Further, many believe he will rise from a revised roman empire. But in any case, it is clear the antichrist will rule the world in concert with a group of the world's most powerful and evil leaders.

To help us better understand the overall chain of events let's look a little deeper into the actions of the seven empires as they sought to destroy Israel:

1. Egypt - When Joseph was co-regent of Egypt his native people were treated well. But generations later a pharaoh who did not know Joseph became concerned that "...the Israelites have become far too numerous for us." (Exodus 1:9). So he put them under severe punishment and back breaking work, but they continued to multiply and prosper. So the pharaoh ordered the Egyptian midwives, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." (Exodus 1:16). When his orders were not carried out the pharaoh gave another order to all of his people, "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live." (Exodus 1:22). So why did the pharaoh only stipulate boys would be killed? Because, unbeknownst to him it would be a male son who would be the Hebrew Messiah. He was used by satan to destroy the people of Israel in an attempt to stop the birth of Christ. --- Clearly, the pharaoh was the crown on this head. An office of leaders guided by satan. A ruler of whom God said, "I am against you, pharaoh of Egypt, you great monster..." (Ezekiel 29:3).

2. Assyria - Around 734-722BC the Assyrians attacked the ten northern tribes of Israel and took them into exile. They were a bloodthirsty people known for their mistreatment of a conquered people. In 2 Kings 15:29 we get an indication of who would be the crown on this head, "In the time of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ljon, Abel, Beth Maakah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all of the land of Naphtai, and deported the people to Assyria." --- "So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria (that is, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria), who took the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh into exile. He took them to Halah, Habor, Hara and the river Gozan, where they are to this day." (1 Chronicles 5:26).

3. Babylon - in the Bible the kingdom of Babylon became synonymous with sin. The progenitor of sin, Babel (Genesis 11:9), would set the stage for idolatry that would not only become Babylon but would also spread false religion around the world. Throughout the book of Revelation we see the expansion of this wickedness to the point the socio-political infrastructure of the antichrist is called "Babylon The Great The Mother of Prostitutes And of the Abominations of the Earth." (Revelation 17:5). Here in chapter 12 we see the historic kingdom of Babylon whose armies conquered the southern tribes of Judah in the 580's to 600'sBC, captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and took the people into exile for seventy years (Daniel 9:1-19). "During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land..." (2 Kings 24:1) - "At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it..." (2 Kings 24:10).

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it." (Daniel 1:1). Unlike the Assyrians who resettled their captives in Assyrian territory, Babylon only took the leaders and prominent citizens and left the poor and weak to fend for themselves. The return of the exiles is chronicled in three phases. First under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6), second under Ezra (Ezra 7-10) and finally through Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1-2). The crown of this head is Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon during this period.

4. Medo-Persia - from 486 to 465BC Xerxes the Great, the fourth king of the Achaemenid Empire ruled Persia. He "...ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush." (Esther 1:1). His prime minister, Haman - obviously influenced by satan - tricked the king to issue a decree commanding all Jews would be killed, "Dispatches were sent by couriers to all of the kings provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews - young and old, women and children - on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods." (Esther 3:13). This was yet another attempt by satan to destroy the people of Israel. But God had other plans and used Esther, a hidden Jew, by placing her in a prominent position to stop Haman's schemes and save the Hebrew people.

Ironically, Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes (stepson of Esther) and the sixth king of the empire, was the king who in 445BC issued a decree to rebuild Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 2:1-9). Unbeknownst to him he also played a part in the end-times prophecy when Gabriel told Daniel, "...from the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens" and sixty-two "sevens..." (Daniel 9:25). You'll recall from our past study it was this decree that initiated the "Seventy Weeks of Daniel" that will be completed during the Tribulation.

5. Greece - In 338BC the 20 year old son of Phillip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great, conquered most of the Middle East, including Israel. But Alexander took a different tact in conquering most nations. Rather than killing their people and destroying their land he instead sought to conquer them psychologically by luring them to adopt the Greek way of life. By the time he died at 32 years old he had set the stage for the Hellenistic Age which sought to "Make all Things Greek." To the point they would change a nations' government to suit their model, impose Greek mythology and gods to supplant their own religion, and even change the local language to Greek. So much so that the first non-Hebrew version of the Bible, the "Septuagint" - was translated into the Greek language in the third century BC because of the large number of Greek speaking Jews. The Greeks ruled the Middle East from 333 to 166BC when they were conquered by Rome. Ironically, it was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Syrian-Greek who attacked Jerusalem in 168BC, desecrating its temple and setting the stage for the antichrist to do the same thing during the Tribulation. (Daniel 9:27 / 11:21 / 11:31 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Matthew 24:15).

6. Rome - Arguably the most powerful of all ancient empires was Rome. For over 500 years Rome conquered and controlled the territory previously controlled by the Greeks and then expanded their rule to encompass the region from North Africa, into what is now Northern Europe and through the Middle East -- an area of almost two million square miles. At the time of Christ Israel was a conquered territory under the rule of Roman regional-military governors. They imposed Roman cult religions which were a carry-over from earlier Greek mythology and they added to this polytheistic emperor worship. It was the Romans who officiated the crucifixion of Jesus and under emperor Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70AD. This is the event Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 when He said "Do you see all these things?" He asked [looking towards Jerusalem]

"I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."
(Matthew 24:2).

7. The unnamed empire - As we've seen, scripture indicates the seventh and eighth king will be the antichrist. He will be the last of a long line of satan influenced leaders who have sought to destroy Israel. But the antichrist will be different. He will be much more than simply influenced by satan. He will be totally controlled by the dragon and given powers unlike any human leader before. But he will fail and at the return of Christ will be destroyed. We will study him in much more detail when we get to chapter 13.

LESSON 57

Revelation, Chapter 12 verses 4 & 7-9

Quick Recap:

In our first two lessons on chapter 12 we talked about the importance of recognizing Israel as the chosen people of God. Not only from an historical perspective but from the critical role they will play in God's future plans. In doing so we refuted the increasingly popular "Replacement Theology" that contends the church has replaced Israel as the chosen people of God. The Bible is very clear about the preeminent role of Israel - even during the Tribulation when the church is already raptured, "The woman [Israel] fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days." (Revelation 12:6). I'm not sure how anyone could read that verse and not understand God's continued love for Israel. Not only will He protect her, but He will have already prepared a place specifically for her, and then He will take care of her through the last half of the Tribulation period. I stress this point because as American Christians we must understand the critical role we play as allies of Israel. Why? Because it is God's command, but also because we want to be counted amongst the nations blessed by God for blessing Israel. (Genesis 12:3).

In verse 1 we saw a "great sign"; a woman, who is symbolic of Israel, the birth-people and birth-place of the Messiah. Verse 2 illustrates the pain Israel has endured for centuries as she awaits the arrival of the promised King. That pain is caused in part by their own disobedience but also by satan, the red dragon in verse 3, who has throughout time sought to destroy Israel as a means of destroying her Messiah.

For this lesson, we're going to skip verses 5 and 6 for now and discuss verses 4 plus 7 through 9. This will provide a little more detail on satan's role in his efforts to destroy Israel, and through her the Messianic work of God. Once we finish that we'll go back and pick-up at verse 5.

So let's unpack verses 4 and 7-9

4. "Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born."

7. "Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."

4.a. - "Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth."

Verse 4 continues the description of satan, the red dragon, by using the imagery of "...Its tail..." to represent his influence that "...swept...", or convinced, one-third of heaven's angels to join him in rebellion against God. The Bible doesn't say how he was able to influence angelic beings in this way, but obviously his actions are part of God's overall plan. We last saw satan in chapter 9 when, "The fifth angel sounded his Trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth."

That "star", as we learned, was unlike any other star. That's because it is not a heavenly body, but is a created being who had fallen from grace. That event is described by the prophet Isaiah, "How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit." (Isaiah 14:12-15).

Here we are reminded that the red dragon is the fallen angel lucifer, "...the ancient serpent called the devil, or satan..." (Revelation 12:9). The name lucifer in Hebrew means the "shining one", in Greek the "son of morning", or "morning star", and in Latin, the "light bringer". All indicate what satan once was in his original angelic role, but now as the fallen star these names represent one who set his sights on being above God. As a result, he was driven out of heaven and became who we recognize as satan, or as he is called here in Revelation - the dragon. It was he who led man into temptation's fall and brought sin upon the earth, and it is he who during the Tribulation will continue to pursue his original desire to make himself above God. Jesus spoke of his fall in Luke 10:18 when He told the seventy-two disciples, "I saw satan fall like lightning from heaven." When that happened he took with him an army of disobedient angels (probably millions) who became his demons.

And yet, even though satan was cast out of heaven it appears he, and his demons as well, still have access to heaven and even to the throne room of God. In Job 1:6-7 we see satan standing before God, "One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and satan also came with them." (Job 1:6-7 / 2:1) He was there to report on his activities of, "...roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." This indicates his presence before the throne was not only allowed, but occurred after his banishment from heaven to earth and after he had caused the fall of man. It also indicates he is still allowed to enter heaven because he is there to accuse us night and day before God (Revelation 12:10). Peter also spoke of satan's earthly presence when he warned us to, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8). Based on this it appears satan and his demons are currently free to roam the earth and visit heaven as well, but as we will see, his heavenly visitation privileges are only temporary.

4.b. - "The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born."

In Genesis 3:15 God warned satan that enmity would exist between him and the seed of Eve --- Jesus (Luke 4:1-13). From that curse satan has always known that Christ will one day destroy him. That's why he's so focused on destroying Israel, and through her the Messiah Jesus. Through prophecy satan would have known about the birth of the promised Messiah and the fact He would come as a Jew through Israel. That's because over 700 years before Christ was born Isaiah prophesied that He:

- Would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14),
- Would be born in Bethlehem, through Israel and Judah (Isaiah 8:14 / 9:6),
- His name would be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6),
- He will reign from David's throne and over His kingdom (during the Millennium) (Isaiah 9:7).

- As a result, satan has tried over and over for centuries to eliminate the Messiah by eliminating Israel and her people. But satan failed to deflect His birth, so once Jesus was born he resorted to other actions:
- he influenced King Herod to murder all boy children in Bethlehem, but God warned Joseph who fled with Mary and Jesus to Egypt -- I presume, like in Revelation, to a place God had prepared for them. (Matthew 2:13-18).
- he influenced the wicked pharisees to lie about Jesus in order to discredit Him, even as they sought ways to kill Him. (Matthew 12:14 / John 11:53).
- he influenced the people of Nazareth to throw Jesus off a cliff but He walked away unscathed (Luke 4:29),
- he entered Judas and used him to betray Jesus to the Jewish religious and civil leadership (Luke 22:3),
- he caused Peter to become a barrier to the cross (Matthew 16:23),
- he caused Israel to reject Jesus and accept a criminal instead. (John 18:40).
- and to this day he causes man to sin and Israel to reject their rightful King.

In each of these events, and many more like them, satan stood in front of Israel "...so that it might devour her child..."

7. "Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back."

7.a. - "Then war broke out in heaven."

Now in chapter 12 we see the Archangel Michael in battle with satan and his demonic forces. A battle that takes place in heaven, and a battle that results in satan being permanently banished to earth. I wonder how many Christians have ever thought about the fact war could occur in heaven. Evidently it did prior to satan's first banishment when he was thrown to earth, (Isaiah 14:12-15), and as we see here, it will occur again when the angel Michael battles satan in the event described here in chapter 12. But as we will see later in this verse, and in reference to Daniel 10, war must have continued up to this day. This is indicated by Paul who reminds us that our own battles are not against flesh and blood, "...but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm..." (Ephesians 6:12).

7.b. - "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon..."

Michael, the archangel (Jude 9), whose name in Hebrew means "Who is like God", is only mentioned a few times in the Bible. He and Gabriel are also the only two angels mentioned by name. Obviously, Michael is a warrior. In Daniel 10 we see Gabriel coming with a message from God for Daniel, but he was detained by a battle that lasted twenty-one days with "...the prince of the Persian kingdom..." -- an obvious reference to a powerful demon or satan-- but, "Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me..." (Daniel 10:13). How odd that Gabriel would battle a demon for twenty-one days, yet if we follow the story a bit longer we find, "Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come..." (Daniel 10:20). Just because Michael came to help fight doesn't mean they totally defeated the demon, because Gabriel, after he presents God's message to Daniel returned to continue the fight with the prince of Persia. But before leaving he warns Daniel that another demon, the prince of Greece will soon come. Ironically, both Persia and Greece are two of the ancient empires represented by the seven heads of the dragon in verse 3, and it was Greece who defeated the Persians in 338BC. It's also interesting that Michael came to relieve Gabriel so he could be on his way. Maybe this is because

both Persia and Greece would seek to destroy Israel of whom Michael is their protector. We see him in this role in Daniel 11:1 when Gabriel tells Daniel that Michael is "...your prince...", speaking to Daniel as a Jew, which means he is speaking of Michael as Israel's guardian. We see this again in Daniel 12 where it is revealed that during the Tribulation, "...a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until then...", that, "...Michael, the great prince who protects your people [Israel], will rise." (Daniel 12:1). This appears to be in reference to the events we now see in Revelation Chapter 12 when Michael will rise against satan to defend God's chosen people Israel. Verse 7 also indicates Michael does this with a heavenly army he commands in battle. --- I find that fact very comforting.

7.c. - "...and the dragon and his angels fought back."

The wording here seems to indicate satan "...fought back...", which is clearly a defensive posture. This may indicate Michael initiated the attack to banish satan. --- We don't know when this will occur and commentators differ on the matter. Maybe it's when the antichrist will initially come on the scene? (Revelation 6:2). Or maybe when the antichrist declares himself to be god? (Daniel 9:27 / Matthew 24:15 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Or maybe in preparation for opening the Abyss of hell? (Revelation 9:1-3). We don't know the exact time, but it's clear that at some point in the future satan will be forcibly removed from heaven - never to return. This verse also verifies he has his own army of angels who will be hurled to earth with him. When this happens it appears that satan and his demons will have been cast to earth a second time and his access to heaven will be over.

8. "But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven."

What's so amazing about this verse is the fact satan and his demons even had "...their place..." in heaven. It is not just "a" place, where they could go, but it is "their" place. (Try to wrap your head around that). Not only did they lose the battle to Michael but in doing so they lost their place as well, and with that they were banished to earth for a time until he is destroyed by Christ. (Revelation 20:10).

9. "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."

This verse leaves no doubt who the red dragon is. He is the serpent of the garden, he is the "devil", a Greek word meaning to slander or falsely accuse (Revelation 12:10), and he is satan, which in the Greek is an "adversary" or "enemy." He is all evil, a liar to men, a thief of men, a destroyer of all mankind who choose will not turn to Christ. He has great power, but his power has no redeeming value. He can create hate but he cannot create love. He can create fear but he cannot create strength. He can create doubt but he cannot create faith. He can create rejection but he cannot create redemption. His evil is absolute in the sense that evil is all he has control over. Nothing helpful or healing will ever come from him, because he is only evil. Through time he has led much of the world to reject God. A task he continues to this day in his efforts to steal the souls of as many deceived people as he can.

But...he will be defeated. The Lord Jesus will triumph over him as the blood of the Lamb covers us with a shield of the righteous as we put on His armor for battle. --- As you go into the world today the enemy will tempt you; with sin, with fear, with despair. But we must fight it. You are washed in the holy sovereign blood of the Lamb of God, you are given the armor of God with the word as your sword, and you can do all things through the strength God gives you.

But you can go into the dark world with Jesus in your heart and watch the darkness flee.

LESSON 58

Revelation, Chapter 12, verses 5 and 6

In our last discussion we skipped verses 5 and 6 so we could focus on verses 4 and 7 through 9. Those verses are all related to satan's efforts to destroy Israel and his battle with the archangel Michael, so we could review them together.

Now we'll go back and pick-up verses 5 and 6.

5. "She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days."

What an amazing pair of verses. From His prophesied birth to His redemption of Israel during the Tribulation, the Biblical story of Christ is condensed into these few beautiful words.

5. " She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne."

5.a. - "She gave birth to a son, a male child..."

In this case "she" could be a reference to Mary but in the context of this chapter I believe it is speaking of Israel; the "woman" in verse 1. She is preeminent as the nation and people through which God came to earth as a man (Micah 5:2). His birth was the fulfillment of God's Messianic promise that Israel would bear the coming King, "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants [Israel]. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and high priest in service of God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." (Hebrews 2:15-17). It is this baby, the earthly Son of Israel, of whom Simeon spoke when he saw the infant child in the temple and recognized who He was, "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:30-32). This is the child of whom Isaiah prophesied to Israel, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." - a name which in Hebrew means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14 / Matthew 1:22), a reference later cited by John when he reminded us that Jesus "...became flesh and made his dwelling among us..." (John 1:14). This is Jesus, the prophesied Messiah, the coming King of which Gabriel spoke to Mary, - "But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's [Israel's] descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.'" (Luke 1:33). This is the kingdom God promised when He said, "He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (2 Samuel 7:13). And it is this throne from which the Lord will reign during the Millennium and in the New Jerusalem. (Revelation 20:6 / 22:3).

This is the point when God's promised Messiah comes to earth to bring His message of grace and redemption. It is also the point when God invalidated the need for a sacrificial system by offering

to provide atonement through the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God. It is when the Son of God became the Son of Man with the task of giving Himself for the souls of men. (Isaiah 53:5 / 12). This was not just a son or a male child, He is the King of kings and Lord of lords who has come and will come again.

Hallelujah!

5.b. - "...who "will rule all nations with an iron scepter."

In chapter 19 we will see Jesus as the Holy Judge returning to retake His throne over all creation, "The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule with an iron scepter.'" (Revelation 19:14-15). This is the Lord in His rightful place as King of kings. His rule will be absolute and sovereign. He cannot be defeated nor destroyed and His judgment will be swift and complete. This is the imagery of the iron scepter. It is an image of His rule, "...and I will make nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron..." (Psalms 2:8-9). A rod spoken of by Micah as God instructs the Messiah to, "Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance..." (Micah 7:14). The image of the rod in battle, the staff of the Shepherd and the scepter of the Forever King speaks to His place as our Sovereign and Holy Lord.

Hallelujah!

5.c. - "...And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne."

The first part of this verse spoke to the birth of our Lord and His place as our divine King. As he is "...snatched up..." Jesus has fulfilled His initial task of bringing the promise of redemption to a rebellious Israel and an unsuspecting Gentile people. This speaks of His ascension after His resurrection. After He was given as the sacrificial Lamb on the cross and came forth as the victorious King from the empty tomb.

- This is the day "...he was taken up to heaven...", to sit at the right hand of God until the appointed time when He will return as the Warrior King (Acts 1:2).
- This is the result of a command given by God, "The Lord said to my Lord; 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" (Acts 2:34-35).
- This is our King who is "...the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (Hebrews 1:1-3 / 12:2).
- This is the, "...Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:34 / 1 Peter 3:22).

This is the scene we saw in chapter 5 when the Lamb stood before the throne; having arisen from His seated position to take His role as Warrior and Judge, "He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne." (Revelation 5:7). This was the opening move to judgment and everlasting righteousness. This is the moment when He went from seated at the right hand of God to standing before God to begin His final judgment actions.

Hallelujah!

6. "The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days."

6.a. - "The woman fled into the wilderness..."

The woman mentioned here clearly speaks of Israel during the later part of the Tribulation period. There is a similar story in Daniel -- a story that would literally take a month to unpack, but we'll summarize it here. There we see Antiochus Epiphanes, a Selucid (Syrian) ruler who sought to destroy Egypt. Thwarted by Egypt and their Roman allies Antiochus returned north and took out his anger on the Israelites in his path. It was there he halted their worship, banded the levitical sacrifice, desecrated the temple, sacrificed a pig on the altar and set an idol of zeus in the Holy of Holies for Israel to worship. This is the event called "the abomination that causes desolation". (Daniel 11:2-3). It is also the prophetic parallel to the future actions of the antichrist spoken of by Gabriel to Daniel. "He [the antichrist] will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven'. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." (Daniel 9:27). This is the future event described by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." (Matthew 24:15). In the ancient example there were disloyal Jews who sided with Antiochus. It is these, "...who forsake the holy covenant..." enabling Antiochus to "...corrupt those who have violated the covenant..." (Daniel 11:30-32). But there was a remnant of obedient Jews who fought back against Antiochus. They were "...the people who know their God will firmly resist him." (Daniel 11:32). Those who resisted included the Hasideans, a group known to be "...mighty warriors of Israel, everyone who offered himself willingly for the law...". They joined the group led by Mattathias Maccabeus and his five sons who fled into the wilderness to regroup and fight against Antiochus. Mattathias' son Judah ("the hammer") led the remnant Israelite army who defeated the Seleucid forces and freed Israel. Their story of defiance against Antiochus is found in the apocryphal book of Maccabees (1 Maccabees chapters 1-4 and notably 1:44-54). One of several non-conical books of early Jewish history who in combination are called The Apocrypha. Their story is also found in the writings of the first century historian Flavius Josephus. Their resistance in the face of certain death is the origin of the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah - the festival of lights -, which commemorates the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem after the Maccabeans defeated the Selucidian army.

6.b. - "...to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days."

Now in chapter 12 we find the future parallel of the Antiochus-like abomination prophesied in Daniel 9. During the Tribulation, the demonically-led antichrist will also enter the temple in Jerusalem, abominate the Holy of Holies and declare himself to be God. At that point a remnant of Israel will flee into the wilderness to escape the armies of the antichrist. This is the time mentioned earlier when the Gentiles will "...trample on the holy city for 42 months. (Revelation 11:2); which is the same as 1,260 days, three and a half years, or "time, times and half a time." All represent the last half of the seven year Tribulation.

But who from Israel will flee? There are various opinions but we'll briefly talk about two. Some contend the Jews who will flee are the survivors who after the resurrection of the Two Witnesses, "...were terrified and gave glory to God in heaven. These would probably be believing Jews who now recognized Jesus as the Messiah and who will "...look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him and one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:10). Others contend

those who flee may be, or may include, Jews who have not yet accepted Christ as the Messiah, but they will understand the person who has by that time declared himself to be god and has demanded their worship, is not the Messiah. In this view they are not yet saved, but they know he is an impostor.

They flee to a place God has prepared for them in advance, and He will protect them for 1,260 days which is the second half of the seven year Tribulation period and the time of God's most severe wrath. We will discuss this in more detail when we get to verse 14.

I think it's interesting to look at another point in Biblical history when a "remnant" of Israel fled in the face of satan's attack. In his effort to destroy the child Jesus satan influenced King Herod to issue a decree that all male children under two years old in Bethlehem would be killed. But God countered satan's plot and commanded Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt where they would be safe, "Get up", he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Matthew 2:13-15). This references an event prophesied through Hosea, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." (Hosea 11:1). Although this Old Testament prophetic context is speaking of the people of Israel and their exodus, Matthew ties the event to the exodus of the Messiah-child to Egypt from which God would later call Him. The Bible doesn't say, but I assume God prepared a place for Joseph, Mary and Jesus, and protected them until he called them back. Just as He will prepare a place for Israel to escape to. It is an interesting parallel between the remnant of Israel who fled to Egypt to escape drought (Genesis 47:27), Joseph and Mary who fled to Egypt to protect Israel's Holy King, (Matthew 2:13) and the future Israel who will flee, "...into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she will be taken care of..." (Revelation 12:6).

LESSON 59

Revelation chapter 12, verses 10-12

Quick Recap:

Over the last few lessons we've bounced around a bit in chapter 12:

- First, we studied verses 1 and 2 so we could focus on the imagery of the woman, who represents Israel.
- Then we covered only verse 3. This allowed us time to dig deep in the word to uncover who the seven headed dragon represents (satan). It also took us to some fascinating verses in chapter 17 that we'll go to in even more detail later. Although the interpretation of these passages is often debated we used scripture to interpret scripture to help us see more clearly what it appears to mean.
- We skipped over verses 5 and 6 and instead covered a combination of verse 4 plus 7 through 9. We did that because all four of those verses deal with satan's war with the Archangel Michael and his final banishment from heaven.
- Then we went back and picked-up verses 5 and 6 which summarize the life of Jesus from His birth to His protection of Israel during the Tribulation.

We broke the verses down this way so we could discuss groups of verses that have a common focus. Now in verses 10-12 we see the celebration in heaven when satan will be finally thrown to earth. For those of us in heaven at that time it will not only mean the end to satan's visits to heaven, but it will be a sign that the time for Christ's return draws near.

Now, let's unpack the heavenly praise of verses 10 through 12.

10.a. - "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:"

The Bible doesn't tell us who is making "...a loud voice..." but as we studied in earlier lessons loud voices of praise seem to be a pretty common occurrence in heaven.

- We saw this in chapter 5 when the Twenty-Four Elders (arguably the raptured church) and the Four Living Creatures sang a new song of praise for the Lamb who was worthy to open the judgment scroll.
- They were followed by the heavenly host who praised Jesus "...in a loud voice..." as the Worthy One, the slain Lamb and the Father on His throne (Revelation 5:9-13).
- Then in chapter 7 we saw the multitude of Tribulation saints before the throne, the heavenly host, the Twenty-Four Elders and the Four living Creatures all crying out "...in a loud voice..." in praise for the God's saving power and grace. (Revelation 7:9-17).
- This was followed in chapter 11 by "...loud voices..." and the Twenty-Four Elders who at the seventh trumpet fell before God and praised Him for future events. As you'll recall, their song spoke of things that had not yet occurred, but the Twenty-Four Elders knew what was about to happen and sent their praise ahead of time.

Now in chapter 12 we see a similar praise, but this time the occasion is focused on satan's final banishment from heaven, the authoritative supremacy of God and the recognition of those who have suffered through the Tribulation. There is a slight difference here in the wording from the prior examples. In the praises of chapters 5, 7 and 11 the loud voice seems to be coming from a

group and is prefaced by "...they..." or "...voices..." (plural). But in chapter 12 the voice seems to be singular because it is described as "...a..." loud voice. As if it is one individual. This is similar to what we saw in chapter 10 when John heard "...the voice..." from heaven tell him to take the scroll from the mighty angel. I'm not sure if the singular tense is important but I thought it should be mentioned.

10.b. - "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah."

The voice praises salvation that comes only through the grace and power of God. It is He who is supreme over His created kingdom, and He alone who brings salvation through the singular authority of Christ. It is here we are reminded of the absolute foundation upon which we faithfully stand, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6). This is the ultimate authority of Christ. The only source through which redemption and salvation may be received. This is the authority of the promised Messiah; the Word who became flesh so He could dwell among us (John 1:14), the Chosen Lamb of God who brought God's redemptive grace to the world (John 1:34-36 / 3:16-17), and He who is given all authority of God over all creation (John 5:24-27).

10.c. - "For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."

The Greek word for the devil is "to slander or falsely accuse." He is the ultimate liar, "...for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44). He stands before God's throne and accuses all believers for their failures and sin (Job 2:1-2), and he roams the earth to tempt and devour those who will follow him. (1 Peter 5:8). But he is no match for the power and authority of Christ, who at the right hand of God is "...an advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." (1 John 2:1). It is Christ, "...who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." (Romans 8:33-39). It is Jesus who is our advocate, who stands between us and Satan's power; the great High Priest who was tempted like us, but did not sin, and can therefore pronounce forgiveness through God's grace and mercy. (Hebrews 4:15-16). Though the enemy may slander us before God his accusations fall on deaf ears as He "...removed our transgressions from us..." through the covering blood atonement of the Lamb (Psalms 103:11-12). Now in these verses we see praise for the banishment of Satan and the end of his ability to ever accuse us again. At this banishment he is permanently removed from heaven, never to return, never to accuse, never to put his stinking slimy feet on the holy ground before our God's throne. He has been overcome. --- Thank You Lord!

11. "They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

And who are "they"? I believe this is generally speaking of all believers who have overcome Satan's destructive pull by accepting Christ; but more specifically it speaks of the martyrs who will accept Christ during the Tribulation and be killed for their faith. These are, "...the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained." These will be the believers who at the fifth Seal will cry out from under the altar for God's vengeance for those who had been killed, and of those who will die at the hands of the antichrist. (Revelation 6:9-11 / 13:7). They are the "...souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God...". (Revelation 20:4). Nothing, not even the wrath and

power of satan in his final days could overcome their faith as they will spread the gospel ("their testimony") and stand firm in their faith in the face of certain death.

O that we may have such strength!

12.a. - "Therefore rejoice, you heavens and who dwell in them!"

So they rejoice over the fall of satan through the power of Christ, and they rejoice in the knowledge that our King is soon to return. They all rejoice; the heavens - the very creation of God will cry out like the stones (Luke 19:40), and all who dwell in them will praise His name. This is a call to the raptured church, the angelic beings and the entire heavenly host to celebrate and praise the coming return of Christ and the judgment that will bring His kingdom upon the earth.

12.b. - "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you!"

Even though the devil will be physically banished to earth he is not yet defeated. Through the antichrist, the false-prophet, his one-world government and his demonic false religion he will focus all of his attention on the destruction of Israel and of all believers. This will be a time of destruction and sin like no other. This, combined with God's wrath and judgment will be a time of, "...great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect (believers) those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:22).

12.c. - "He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

His time is limited but his fury is not. He is aware of what is happening which is why he "...knows..." he has little time left. He knows he will be defeated by Christ but he will not give up. He will fight through his power, the antichrist and his blasphemy of anything related to God. He will be the most evil of evil, a wild sinful animal cut loose to destroy everything in his path. He will have "...deceived the inhabitants of the earth..." (Revelation 13:14) until they "...gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven..." (Revelation 16:10-11), he will gather empires from around the world to "...wage war against the Lamb..." (Revelation 17:14).

But he will lose. Despite his power and cunning he will be utterly destroyed. May we now join with the voices of heaven and praise God for the deliverance we know will come.

LESSON 60

Revelation, Chapter 12 verses 13-17

In chapter 11 we saw the seventh angel sound his Trumpet but then learned its judgment blast would not be heard until chapter 15. Between that point and chapter 15 are three short chapters - 12, 13, 14 -- that provide details about characters and events we had already studied. Given that, my original intent was to write a brief overview of each chapter without going into a great deal of detail so that we could continue our study of the seventh Trumpet in chapter 15. But no matter how hard I tried I simply could not write a summary. I tried to abbreviate the chapters, touching only on the high-spots, which seemed legitimate at the time because they covered topics we had already talked about. But I couldn't do it, and no matter how hard I tried the words just wouldn't come together. It was then I realized I had to tell their story. I could not simply summarize these chapters and only touch on their salient points. I had to tell the story in detail because it is in the details where we will learn the most.

Now, we bring chapter 12 to a close. From this a great truth was reinforced in my mind --- God's word cannot be rushed. It must be approached prayerfully, respectfully and with the proper due-diligence in order for it to speak to our hearts. Please forgive me Lord for being in such a hurry.

And with that, let's conclude chapter 12.

13. When the dragon saw that he had been hurled down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpents reach. 15. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring - those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus."

13. When the dragon saw that he had been hurled down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child."

This is a continuation of verse 9 when "The great dragon was hurled down"... "He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." We know from Isaiah 14:12 that at some point in the past satan was cast to earth, but since then it appears he's been allowed to return to heaven (Job 1:6 / 2:1). But now in chapter 12 we see a point during the future Tribulation when satan will be permanently banished to earth. At that point he will increase the intensity of attacks on God's people, with specific focus on destroying the nation of Israel. She is the chosen nation through which the Messiah would be born and bring His sacrificial offer of God's grace to the world. For centuries satan has tried to destroy Israel and thereby destroy her ability to bring-forth the Messiah. Failing at that, he tried to kill the baby Jesus, then he tried to stop the Messiah's ministry and His grace-giving sacrifice and resurrection, but he failed at that too. Since then he has continued to disillusion Israel to the point they still reject Christ to this day.

But now in Revelation 12 we see what will happen during the Tribulation when satan realizes he has lost visitation privileges to heaven and is permanently cast to earth. In his anger and desperation he will make this "...a time of trouble for Jacob [Israel]..." (Jeremiah 30:7) by relentlessly using the limited time he has left to destroy every possible vestige of God's people and His chosen nation Israel. Why? Because he knows Israel is still God's instrument to the world, but as we will see, in their time of greatest trouble they, "...will be saved out of it." (Jeremiah 30:7).

14. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpents reach."

14.a. - "The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle,..."

Of course Israel will not fly on the wings of a real eagle. This imagery represents the protection and speed God will give the people of Israel during the time they flee from satan's grip. This will be at the mid-point of the Tribulation when the antichrist abominates the temple and declares himself to be God. (Matthew 24:15). When that happens many in Israel will flee. This will include Jews who have accepted Christ and Jews who have not yet accepted Him but realize the antichrist is not the true Messiah. In some ways the imagery here is similar to what we see when God enabled Israel to escape Egypt during the exodus. At that time He "...carried you on eagles wings and brought you to myself." (Exodus 19:4). "...like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft..." (Deuteronomy 32:11). This is a sign of the protection He will give Israel. When they will "...take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed..." (Psalms 57:1). A place where "...under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart..." (Psalms 91:4). This is a promise that even we, as non-Jewish believers, can still rely on today, "...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40:31). These are the "wings" of strength God will provide Israel to flee satan's pursuit.

14.b. - "...so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness...,"

In the Olivet Discourse Jesus tells His disciples about this event. Although it would be years before He would complete the Revelation through John, He gave them a clear indication of what will happen. In Luke 21 He tells them to flee when, "...you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains". (Luke 21:20-21). Matthew's account, beginning in 24:15 also warns Israel of the timing of their escape, "So when you see standing in the holy place the 'abomination that causes desolation', [the antichrist] spoken of through the prophet Daniel [Daniel 9:27] - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." As we've discussed, this abomination is the mid-point of the seven-year Tribulation when, "In the middle of the seven (3-1/2) he [antichrist] will put an end to the sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation...". (Daniel 9:27). Jesus further warns them to flee with haste and not to tarry for any reason. They are not to return to their houses for provisions or even for clothes. They are to flee quickly to a place prepared for them by God (Revelation 12:6). There will be no time to prepare because they will be escaping for their lives; from the antichrist whose demonic intent is to destroy Israel (Revelation 13:7).

But where is this "...wilderness..." and these "...mountains..." they will flee to? The Bible doesn't say. Some think maybe the mountains southeast of Jerusalem. Or, maybe where David hid from

Saul. (1 Samuel 23:39). Or the region of Edom, Moab and Ammon [modern Jordan] which appear to be protected during the antichrist's attacks (Daniel 11:41), and specifically Petra, in Jordan, the ancient city of caves. These are all potential options, but no matter where it is we know God will have prepared a place for them in advance and somehow they will know when to flee and how to get there. This in itself is enough to show me the fallacy of "Replacement Theology" and its assertion that God has abandoned Israel in exchange for the church. Instead, we see here that God not only restores Israel but He has prepared a place in advance to secure their safety away from the antichrist.

14.c. - "...where she would be taken care of..."

What beautiful words, "...where she would be taken care of..." Not only will God make a place for Israel to flee, but He will care for her. Undoubtedly providing shelter, food and protection. The armies of the antichrist will pursue her but he will not be able to root her out.

14.d. - "...for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpents reach."

If you'll recall from our Tribulation math, the Tribulation will last seven years (Daniel 9:27). Half of that - the point when the antichrist breaks his treaty with Israel (Daniel 9:27) is three and a half years, which is the same as 42 months (Revelation 11:2), or time+times+half-a-time, and 1,260 days. All of these are ways of describing the three and a half year second half of the Tribulation. It is then that Israel will flee to a place, "...where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days." (Revelation 12:6).

15. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.

In this verse the imagery of satan as the dragon (verse 9) references the serpent of Genesis 3:1). The root of all sin, who pursues Israel into the wilderness. Most conservative scholars believe the "river" speaks of an army. They could be demons like we saw in 9:13-16, but according to Daniel 11 they are more likely human soldiers in the army of the antichrist sent by satan to destroy Israel (Dan 11:16), "...and sweep through them like a flood." (Daniel 11:40). Similarly, Jeremiah speaks of the defeat of Pharaoh Neco's Egyptian army by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar. There they are described as a rising river, "Who is this that rises like the Nile, like rivers of surging waters? Egypt rises like the Nile, like rivers of surging waters. She says, 'I will rise and cover the earth; I will destroy cities and their people.'" (Jeremiah 46:7-8). And see a similar description of the Assyrian army invading Judah, "...the mighty floodwaters of the river - the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breath of your land. O Immanuel!" (Isaiah 8:7-8). During the Tribulation this will be the time when "...Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles..." (Luke 21:24 / Revelation 11:2), as their armies flow through Israel.

16. "But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth."

But during the Tribulation satan's army will be stopped by God; by the earth literally swallowing up his soldiers. An event possibly enabled by one of the earthquakes mentioned so many times in Revelation (11:13 / 16:18 / Matthew 24:7), or more likely it is a direct action by God, like He did to Korah and his disobedient followers who rebelled against God and Moses. In that story, "...the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their

households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community." (Numbers 16:31-33). But however He does it, God will do as He promised and protect the remnant of Israel.

17. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring - those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus."

When Israel flees and God protects her, satan will be infuriated. He will then turn his attention to those who did not flee and to those who "...hold fast their testimony about Jesus." - those who have a testimony about Jesus, Jew or Gentile, who have accepted Christ during the Tribulation. They are those who, "...had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 20:4). The antichrist will be "...given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them." (Revelation 13:7). But his victory will be short-lived (Revelation 12:12), "...until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." (Daniel 9:27). That will happen when, "...they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory." (Luke 21:27).

And as Luke further encourages us, we must stand strong because "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28).

Hallelujah!

LESSON 61

Revelation Chapter 13, verses 1-4

Quick Recap:

In chapter 12 we saw satan's continued pursuit of Israel. There the imagery of a "woman" is used to represent God's chosen people. The nation who would give birth to a male child - the Messiah. The Savior who would come to the world as a man through the nation of Israel and her people. But her role in God's plan set Israel apart and made her a target for satan's wrath. From the garden-fall, until the time of his post-millennial destruction, satan has and will try every tactic to destroy the work of Christ, His chosen nation and His followers. But a day will come when satan is hurled from heaven to earth one last time. It is then, in the short period of time he has left, he will exhaust all efforts to destroy Israel and try to take his place in the role of god. But that will not happen. In the end he will be defeated by the Warrior King Jesus who returns to claim His rightful throne.

Until then satan continues his relentless pursuit to destroy everything and everyone related to God. He does this today through his evil influence on man, our society, morals, politics, laws and attitudes. But during the later part of the Tribulation he will move boldly and openly through a puppet; a man so vile and evil only one name can describe his character and his mission. That name will embody everything that is against Christ and seek to convince man he is the christ, so that he can assume the role of a false christ.

This man will be the "anti"-christ – the “beast.”

Chapter 13, verses 1-10:

In earlier lessons we studied the antichrist by looking at him and his empire from four vantage points:

- What is an antichrist?
- Why is there an antichrist?
- Who is the antichrist?
- What will the antichrist do?

There are various opinions amongst Bible scholars about who the antichrist is, when he will come on the scene and what he will do. The Bible gives many clues but doesn't provide enough detail to clearly understand all we'd like to know. So for the purpose of our study we're not going to fill-in-the-blanks with conjecture. Instead, we'll review key interpretive views by focusing on what the Bible says about who the antichrist is and how he fits into the overall Revelation chronology.

- We first saw him in chapter 6 represented by the rider of the white horse offering false peace to Israel. This will be the fulfillment of a vision given to Daniel by Gabriel that the future antichrist, "...will confirm a covenant with many for one seven." (Daniel 9:27). Here, the "covenant" is a treaty, the "...one seven..." is a seven-year period of time we now know as the Tribulation, and the "...many..." are the people of Israel. In other words, near the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation the antichrist will establish a peace treaty with Israel. But that peace will be short-lived and, "In the middle of the seven he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation..." (Daniel 9:27). After

three and a half years of "peace" the antichrist will enter the new temple in Jerusalem, declare himself to be god and command that all Israel and all the world worship him. This will be an act of intolerable sin against God by the most intolerable sinner of all. (2 Thessalonians 2:4 / Matthew 24:15 / Daniel 9:27).

- We next saw him in chapter 11 when, "...the beast that comes up from the Abyss..." killed the Two Witnesses who had been sent by God to share the gospel with Israel. But this action will backfire and the resurrection of the Two Witnesses in sight of the world will so astound the people of Israel they will begin to understand the true identity of Jesus. It is then, "...the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." (Revelation 11:7 and 12-13).
- He is the "beast out of the sea" (Revelation 13:1).
- The "man of lawlessness", (2 Thessalonians 2:3 / KJV "son of perdition").
- The "man doomed to destruction" (2 Thessalonians 2:3).
- The "little horn" (Daniel 7:8).
- The one who will "...speak against the Most High and oppress His holy people." (Daniel 7:24).
- The "...fierce-looking king, a master of intrigue..." (Daniel 8:23).
- The "...ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." (Daniel 9:26).
- and, the "...king who will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods". (Daniel 11:36).

But no matter his title, he will be a satan-empowered and controlled human who will lead Tribulation-man against God and His people. He will be called to prominence by satan at a time when the sinful world will be in the chaos of God's judgment and looking for a leader. A leader whom satan will place in authority as the beast we see in verse 1. A human monster who comes from the nations of the world to build his empire.

Now in chapter 13 we will dig a little deeper to better understand the details of his emergence and power. Known here as "The beast out of the sea", (from this point-on called the "beast") the antichrist will form a satan-led global government, religion, economy and military as He rises from the Tribulation human population to build a global infrastructure; the system by which he seeks to rule the nations of the earth. Through him evil will be unleashed like never before as the satan-directed antichrist blasphemes and destroys anything associated with Jesus.

In this chapter we will also see another demonic being, "The beast out of the Earth", also called the "false-prophet" (Revelation 16:13). It is he, as a prophet of satan, who will create a demonic-religion to worship the beast. Combined together, the dragon (satan), the beast of the sea (antichrist) and the beast out of the earth (the false-prophet) will create a satanic world empire as they collectively attack Israel (the woman) and every other believer. It is here we will see an unprecedented level of satanic power and worship, to the point nearly all of mankind will willingly allow themselves to be marked with the number 666; identifying them as satan's follower. But God will still be in control and beginning in chapter 14 we will see final judgment poured out upon all evil creation. It is then we will see the character of Jesus many Christians do not think about -- the powerful and mighty Warrior King that Israel expected at His first advent. And with that background let's unpack chapter 13, starting with verses 1-4.

1. "The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. 2. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like a lion. The

dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. 3. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. 4. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?".

1.a. - "The dragon stood..."

We know from chapter 12 verse 9 who the dragon is; "...that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray.". By this point in the Tribulation he will have been defeated by Michael and permanently cast to earth. In the short time he has left he will unleash his fury through the embodiment of evil in one man - the antichrist (see Revelation 12:12).

1.b. - "on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea..."

There are several interpretations of what the "sea" may represent. Many conservative scholars believe the imagery is of the sinful nations and people of the world from which satan will draw a man who will become the antichrist. We see similar imagery in chapter 20 when satan draws together an army for one last battle against Christ. Known as Gog and Magog they will gather in numbers like, "...the sand on the seashore...". The "sea" may also refer to the Abyss, a dreadful place we discussed in chapter 9 that is the source of satan's locusts-like demonic hoard. This is indicated in chapters 11 and 17 where the antichrist is described as "...the beast that comes up from the Abyss." (Revelation 11:7 // 17:8). Taken together these views could indicate the "sea" is the Abyss, or the sinful empire emerging from a post-rapture world, or the demonic influence upon the beast from satan. But in either case, the antichrist will be a man, who is influenced by satan to the point he is the ultimate demonic puppet. We see an indication of how this can happen through Christ's original earthly accuser, Judas, "Then satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus." (Luke 22:3-4 / John 13:27). This is more than simply being tempted by satan to sin. Here Luke tells us that satan, a spirit, physically "entered" and indwelt Judas in order to direct his actions against Christ. Now, in chapter 13 we see satan, the dragon, standing amongst the sinful nations of the world, from whom he will select his chosen leader and through him create an evil empire like the world has never seen before. It is the beast, the antichrist, that satan draws from the sea, and it is his evil empire that will form his sea of nations who will fight against God.

There is an interesting side-note in the use of the word "sea" in Revelation. In chapter 12 satan is thrown to the earth. There the earth is warned, "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you." (Revelation 12:12). Then in chapter 21 the Lord describes the new heaven, new earth and New Jerusalem; the re-created perfect kingdom of God after the destruction of satan and all who followed him. In describing it John says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away, and there was no longer any sea." (Revelation 21:1). Of course this could simply mean God may recreate the earth with no oceans; only land, but I thought it was interesting that the term "sea" is used to describe the place where satan is thrown and from which the antichrist will rise, but the new earth will be created without a "sea". I thought the comparison was interesting.

1.c.- "...it had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name." "...,"

This is very similar to the description of satan we saw in Revelation 12:3 and of the antichrist in Revelation 17:9-14. As we discussed in an earlier lesson, the antichrist will take on the demonic character of satan and therefore is described in much the same way. However, there is a key difference between the two descriptions. In chapter 12 satan is seen with crowns on his seven heads. These represent the seven empires and their kings who have or will seek to destroy Israel -- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and lastly the antichrist. In chapter 13 the beast is seen with crowns on his ten horns. This may indicate an empire and their leaders of ten nation-states who will align with the antichrist during the Tribulation. The term horn often speaks of power, specifically military power, which probably indicates a future confederation of ten nations who follow the antichrist in his military control of the world and his battle with Jesus (Revelation 17:12 // 19:19). We see reference to this in the vision of Daniel who saw "...the beast that crushed and devoured its victims." It had ten horns on its head, but had an eleventh horn, "...a little one, which came up among them..." and "...looked more imposing than the others and had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people [Israel] and defeating them." (Daniel 7:7-9 & 19-21). Gabriel clarifies the meaning of this for Daniel by explaining what the ten horns and the little horns mean. This helps us link Daniel's vision to the future antichrist, "The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress the holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time." (Daniel 7:24-25).

Clearly, this is the antichrist, who will be completely under the control of the dragon and therefore takes on his characteristics represented by heads and horns. These are not physical characteristics, but symbolize the evil empire of satan, manifesting itself in the world-controlling kingdom of the antichrist, who for a time, times and half a time -- three and a half years -- (= 42 months, Revelation 11:2 and 1,260 days, Revelation 12:6), will seek to destroy all who follow the true God. Clearly, the terminology used here indicates the last half of the Tribulation when the antichrist and his army of nations are at their most powerful. These are arguably the same kings referred to in Revelation 19 who come to battle against Jesus. (Revelation 19:19).

Another point that bears mentioning. Many Revelation scholars believe the antichrist's infrastructure will arise from the nations of Europe, an area many historians link to ten ancient people-groups, and a region that was a stronghold of the Roman Empire. Rome was the sixth empire to seek the destruction of Israel and may be revived during the Tribulation as the empire of the antichrist. But no matter where he originates, it is clear the antichrist will rule the world in concert with a group of the world's most powerful and evil leaders who all blaspheme the holy name of God.

2. "The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority."

2.a. - "The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like a lion..."

Here John uses imagery to describe the antichrist that is similar to Daniel's vision of four beasts. Three are empires who sought to destroy ancient Israel - who interestingly, Daniel says "...came up out of the sea.", and a fourth who has ten horns. (Daniel 7:2-6). Similarly, John cites a leopard which probably represents the Greek empire as they sought to control the world under Alexander the Great and four leaders who would later divide and assume control after his death. The bear could represent Medo-Persia, an empire with enormous strength. Finally, the lion could represent the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar who took Israel into exile. John, who would of course be familiar with Daniel's description, uses this imagery to help his readers understand that the new beast is part of a long line of seven empires used by Satan over the centuries to destroy the nation of Israel.

2.b. - "The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority."

Even though the antichrist will be a human he will be given amazing powers in order to deceive the world. Paul says he will have, "...all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing." (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). It is these signs and wonders that will help the antichrist grow in power in the eyes of degenerate man. This will allow him to become the most powerful and evil man on earth.

3. "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast."

Some believe this refers to the ancient Roman Empire that was destroyed but will be revived during the Tribulation. More likely, this refers to the antichrist who at some point will appear to be mortally wounded and then come back to life. This fake-death will be seen as a miracle and, "The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast.". His fake act of "resurrection" will convince the lost world he is a divine being and worthy of praise. Many scholars believe it is this apparent death and resurrection that makes the antichrist "... an eighth king." in his "resurrected" state. (Revelation 17:11). Sadly, the world who would not accept the true death and resurrection of Christ will now accept the false death and resurrection of the antichrist. "He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people." (Daniel 8:24).

But his power will come to an end when he "...is going to his destruction." (Revelation 17:11). As we'll see in chapter 19 his destruction comes when Jesus returns as the Warrior King and destroys the antichrist and his followers, "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and His army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false-prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf."..."The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur." (Revelation 19:19-20). -- At this point, the seventh king "...who once was..." and the eighth king he will become are destroyed forever.

4. "People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?". Paul tells us his signs and wonders will "...serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). As we will see later in this chapter satan uses the false-prophet to further influence the people, "It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed..." "...Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 13:12 and 14). The beast will be given power and military might but satan will use the false-prophet to turn that focus into a religion to worship the antichrist, and through him to worship satan. We see in this satan's desire to take the place of the Father, through the antichrist's role as the Son and the false-prophet as the Holy Spirit. But as we will see, that plan will not succeed.

LESSON 62

Revelation, Chapter 13 verses 5-10

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 13 we saw the dragon, satan, who earlier had been thrown to earth by the Archangel Michael (Revelation 12:9). Afterwards, he is seen standing amongst the nations of the earth to select a man he will embody with evil far beyond anything that has ever been seen before. The man he selects will be the final leader in a long line of satan-influenced men who through time have led their empires to destroy God's people and God's chosen nation. This man will have the characteristics of satan, represented by the imagery of seven heads and ten horns. The heads represent the seven powerful kingdoms who have come against Israel and the horns probably represent a future confederation of ten nations who will join the man in one final effort to destroy Christ and His people. He will be the ultimate protégé of satan, a man used to create a world-wide government, economy, infrastructure and religion.

This man is the antichrist. A human, used by satan in his attempt to supplant the role of Jesus so that satan himself can assume the role of the Father. His power will come from satan, but at some point during his rise the antichrist will appear to die and then be resurrected. This false act, which is opposite of the true death and resurrection of Christ, will be seen by the world as a divine miracle. An enticement for the whole world to worship the antichrist, and through him, to worship satan.

And with that context let's continue to study his actions in verses 5 through 10:

5. "The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. 6. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 7. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. 9. Whoever has ears, let them hear. 10. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. This calls for patience and endurance on the part of God's people."

5. "The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months."

5.a. - "The beast was given a mouth..."

He will be "given" allowed to speak against God, but only within the limits set by God. We must remember that everything exists and functions within the sovereign knowledge and authority of God, and the antichrist is no exception. In carrying out his satan-induced actions he will do nothing outside of God's limitations and fore-knowledge.

5.b. - "... to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months." This serves to remind us of the short time span given to the antichrist's authority. The future Tribulation period will last seven years. At the beginning, the antichrist will foster peace with

Israel but at the mid-point (3 1/2 years) he will turn on them, desecrate the temple and declare himself to be like the messiah. For the next three-and-a-half-years (42 months (Revelation 11:2) / 1,260 days (Revelation 12:6) / a time, times and half a time (Revelation 12:14)), the antichrist will run rampant on the earth as he seeks to destroy all things related to God in order to create a sin-wrought empire for his master. This is the time when the Gentiles will "...trample on the holy city [Jerusalem] for 42 months..." (Revelation 11:2). It is also the time when the antichrist will "...magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods." (Daniel 11:36).

6. "It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven."

This shows the extent of his blaspheming. His mouth, his words, will blaspheme God in every way. As he establishes his global government, controls the economy, builds a military and becomes the focal point of a satan-induced religion, everything he does and says will be against God. He will slander God's holy "I am" name (Exodus 3:13-14), he will curse God's heavenly kingdom and even blaspheme those who inhabit heaven. As in the days of Noah his every word and every thought will be evil (Genesis 6:5).

7. "It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation."

7.a. - "It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them..."

In his vision to Daniel, Gabriel described Jerusalem [Israel] and the Jewish people as "...your people and your holy city..." (Daniel 9:24). Similarly, when Moses was on Mount Sinai God Himself described the nation of Israel as holy, "...then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5-6). Further, Moses reminds Israel that God declares them to be "...a people holy to the Lord your God. For the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deuteronomy 7:6). Israel is God's chosen people which is why the antichrist will continue satan's attempts to destroy them. We see this in chapter 11 when the Gentiles trample the city, in chapter 12 when Israel flees into the wilderness, and in Daniel 7 when, "...the holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time (3 1/2 years).

7.b. - "...And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation."

But even though Israel will be a prime target of the antichrist all Tribulation believers will fall under his wrath. Peter reminds us that we too, as Gentile believers, are, "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation..." (1 Peter 2:9). The term used here, "...every tribe, people, language and nation will include all inhabitants of the earth - both Jews and non-Jews. The gospel will be shared with them (Revelation 14:6), but the majority will follow the antichrist and accept his "...mark..." on their right hand or forehead (Revelation 13:16-18). Without this mark believers will be hunted prey and most will be killed. (Revelation 13:15).

8. "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world."

But some will not follow the antichrist. These will be incredibly strong and faithful believers. People who come to the Lord at a time when accepting Christ and rejecting the antichrist will mean almost certain death. These are the ones whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life with

all other believers. The book Jesus spoke about to the dead church at Sardis (Revelation 3:5). A directory of names of each person who has ever accepted Christ as their Savior. A permanent and irrevocable record of every believer. Those in the book (us) belong to the Lamb whose eternal plan is to provide God's saving grace through His personal sacrifice. These are the people we will see in chapter 20 who, "...had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 20:4).

9. "Whoever has ears, let them hear."

Jesus used these same words in His letters to the seven churches, but there He amended them by adding, "...what the Spirit says to the churches" (see chapters 2-3). Now, John uses the same phrase but without mention of the Spirit or the churches. Some believe this is because the church will have been raptured by this point. But even-so, the statement is a proclamation for the reader and the hearer to pay attention to what is being said.

10. "If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. This calls for patience and endurance on the part of God's people."

And this is a point John wants us to pay attention to and understand. Tribulation saints will go through a terrible time when simply accepting Christ will make them a target of everyone. Much like the Jews in Nazi Germany they will be hated and hunted down. Some will go to prison and some will be killed, but it will be their patient and undying faith that will speak so boldly for Jesus. As Paul reminded the believers at Corinth, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). This divine power and our greatest weapon against Satan is our faith in the Lord Jesus. No evil can own us and no army can defeat us, because although our human body may be destroyed, our spirit will live eternally with the Lord. Our faith is a weapon Satan does not have. Our faith is a weapon he cannot defeat. Our faith is the armor we wear in our daily struggles of life. Wear it and defeat the enemy every day!

And as we reflect on the future challenges of Tribulation believers may we prayerfully remember our brothers and sisters around the world who suffer every day for their faith. Whether imprisoned in North Korea or hunted down and executed in Iran, we have spiritual relatives who are going through the same persecutions we see in this chapter.

I once met a refugee from Pakistan. He rolled up his sleeves to show both arms that had been slashed several times with a machete. He looked me in the eyes and simply said "But I never denied Jesus." I left his meager one-room apartment and wept at the weakness of my own faith. May we never go a day without stopping to think of, and pray for, those who suffer today for the name of our King.

LESSON 63

Revelation, chapter 13, verses 11-18

Quick Recap:

The first half of chapter 13 dealt with the rise of the antichrist - the "beast of the sea". A satan-personified human who will establish a one-world order during the Tribulation period. His power will reach its zenith in the last three and a half years when he will rule the world through an empire so evil it is hard to wrap our heads around it. During that time, he will seek to destroy Israel and all other believers, and near the end will even bring his armies in battle against Jesus.

Now in the second half of chapter 13 we meet another man. A man satan will use to establish a world-wide religion to worship the antichrist. At first he will appear meek but his evil actions will play a huge role in satan's desire to destroy the plans and people of God.

This man, known as "the beast out of the earth", is more commonly referred to as the "false-prophet" - the consummate prophet of evil.

Now, with that context let's complete our study of chapter 13.

11. "Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. 12. It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. 13. And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. 14. Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 15. The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image be killed. 16. It also forces all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, 17. so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. 18. This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666."

11. "Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon."

11.a. - "Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth..."

As we've discussed, the Tribulational empire of satan will have three key personalities:

1. satan - the source of all evil and sin,
2. The antichrist - The "beast out of the sea". A human who will become the satan-possessed leader of a world-wide demonic empire,
3. The false-prophet - the "beast out of the earth". He will be the "religious" element of satan's empire and use his powers to influence the world to worship the antichrist - and through him, to worship satan.

Here in verse 11 we're introduced to the second beast of the evil trinity. A man described in Revelation imagery as coming "...out of the earth...". Earlier in this chapter we saw the first beast described as coming out of the "sea". You'll recall the meaning of that term is debatable, and may represent a number of possibilities, which include:

- The "sea" may be the sinful post-rapture world satan calls the antichrist from,
- It may mean hell or the influence of a powerful demon from the Abyss of hell. (Revelation 9:1-2 / 11:7).
- And/or it could represent the evil empire the antichrist will establish once in power.

But here, the second beast comes from the "earth". This is another term, like the "sea", that is debated with many of the same opinions.

- Some believe he will also come from the world's post-rapture population, but in more of a servants role than that of a powerful leader like the antichrist.
- Others believe the "earth" could indicate he will come from hell, or will at the least be influenced by a powerful demon from the Abyss of hell.
- Still others believe "earth" could be used to describe the "land" of Israel, which could indicate he might be a Jew. The Bible often uses the word "land" to represent Israel (Genesis 12:7 / 13:15 / Joshua 11:23), plus, being a Jew would give him some credibility when he attempts to convince Israel to worship the antichrist instead of the real Messiah.

But whatever his debated origin, the role of the second beast will be as a "false-prophet"; the preeminent religious leader of satan. A term used to describe both him and his evil actions. (Revelation 16:13, 19:20 and 20:10).

11.b. - "It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon."

He has horns, which indicate power, but he only has two compared to the antichrist who has ten, plus his horns are like those of a lamb. The antichrist is described in Revelation 13:2 and in Daniel chapter 7 in a much different way. Although he too is described with horns, he is also given the imagery of three powerful animals; a leopard, a bear and a lion. As we have previously studied in Daniel chapter 7 and here in Revelation 13, these could represent the strength, power and swiftness of three past empires, Greece, Medo-Persia and Babylon, who in the past sought to destroy Israel. In contrast, here we see the false-prophet described as a lamb, which we would normally think of as a quiet and gentle animal. But that is a ruse. He will initially appear as a servant who supports the antichrist, but as we will see, he is anything but weak. His actions, described in later verses are powerful, cunning and dangerous. He may appear to be a lamb but he will speak with the power of satan - the dragon.

12. "It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed."

12.a. - "It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast,..."

In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 Paul reminds us that satan often presents himself in a positive light, which can be subtly seen in his deceitful followers, "For such people are false-prophets, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles for Christ. And no wonder, for satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness." The false-prophet will seem to be something he is not. Masquerading as a lamb he will in-fact be an evil tool of satan. He will have powers similar to that of the antichrist but he

will not be a political or military leader. Instead, like satan, who cunningly convinced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the false-prophet will convince the nations and her people to worship the false-christ.

12.b. - "...whose fatal wound had been healed."

Here as in verse 12 is mentioned again the fatal wound of the antichrist. This is an event we discussed in Revelation 13:3 and 17:8 with the result that, "The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast." This ruse, arguably a fake death and resurrection (as opposed to Christ's real death and resurrection) will be a key element in drawing the world into a one-world religion focused on worship of the antichrist.

13. "And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people."

13.a. - "And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth..." During our study of the Two Witnesses (chapter 11) we discussed their possible attribution to Moses and Elijah. Interestingly, in defeating the prophets of baal Elijah called down fire from heaven to destroy them and their altar. (1 Kings 18:38). The actions of the false-prophet may be a counterfeit sign like this event - an event Israel would recognize from their history - and it may compete with actions of the Two Witnesses who killed with, "...fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies..." (Revelation 11:5). Paul tells us the antichrist "...will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie..." (2 Thessalonians 2:9), and here in Revelation 13:12 we're told the false-prophet has the same satan-given authority as the antichrist, but he uses it on the antichrist's behalf.

13.b. - "...in full view of the people."

The "people" could mean anyone living on earth during the Tribulation, but it may also be speaking specifically of "...your people..." in Daniel 9:24, which is Israel. Keep in mind, the Tribulation is the "Time of Jacob's trouble" - meaning its focus is on Israel - so the use of "people" could be speaking to the Jews. Interestingly, the powers of the false-prophet are seen "...in full view..." which is how the world will see the death of the Two Witnesses who are seen by "...some from every people, tribe, language and nation..."...and... "The inhabitants of the earth..." (Revelation 11:9-10). In "...full view..." also indicates the false-prophet displays his power openly. He is no longer represents the cunning snake of the garden, but instead uses his powers and signs in view of all the world.

14. "Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived."

14.a. - "Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth."

With these signs he will deceive the whole world. Paul warned Timothy of this when he said "There will be terrible times in the last days..." (2 Timothy 3:1), when mankind will fall into deep sin. He also cites the activities of Jannes and Jambres, the two Egyptian magicians who used tricks and signs to oppose Moses. (Exodus 7:11 /8:7). This is the influence the false-prophet will use to convince the sinful population of earth to worship the antichrist. (Revelation 13:4)

14.b. and 15. - "It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived."

15. The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image be killed."

From Daniel 9:27, 11:31, Matthew 24:15, and 2 Thessalonians 2:4, we know an event will occur when the antichrist will stand in the holy place (the temple in Jerusalem) (Matthew 24) and set "...himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." (Daniel 9:27), and "...with flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant..." (Daniel 11:31). This event is the "...abomination that causes desolation..." we've discussed many times. But now this verse also indicates an image - possibly an idol - of the antichrist will be put in the temple and it will speak. Typically, we think of idols as being unable to speak (Psalms 135:15-16 / Habakkuk 2:19), but this is no imaginary deity. It is a real man, embodied by satan, in a time on earth like we've never seen before. So, given that, it seems the antichrist will give life of-sorts to the image of the beast so that it may speak and curse "...all who refused to worship the image...". These will be the Tribulation saints. Those who Jesus recognizes "...because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 20:4).

Interestingly, the image will be placed there "...in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived." This is a recognition of the risen antichrist, but here we see it was "...wounded by the sword...". Many scholars believe this indicates he will be wounded in battle (potentially the conflict in Daniel 11:40) or maybe even an attempted assassination. We don't know exactly what will happen, but scripture indicates he will appear to die in violence and "...yet lived...". --- I need to mention something here for clarity. Some believe the events of wounding and resurrection are not speaking of the antichrist but instead indicate the fall and rebirth of the Roman Empire. The thought being the antichrist will rise from Europe, which is the last remnants of the Roman Empire. That opinion certainly has merit, and, as we've discussed in earlier lessons, the antichrist may very well emerge from Europe, but personally I believe the fake death and resurrection of the antichrist is yet another ruse used to dissolution the world, and specifically the people of Israel that the antichrist is the messiah.

16. "It also forces all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads...,"

This is the "mark of the beast". It is not the Covid vaccine. Let's be clear about that. The mark of the antichrist will be given to those of every walk of life who worship the beast. No matter what you see on YouTube it will not be a mark given to those who have a vaccine. There are a couple of reasons for this -- First, the mark spoken of here signifies those who "worship" (spiritually) the antichrist as a god. Secondly, none of this will happen until the bride is removed at the Rapture and the antichrist comes to power (the first Seal) and desecrates the temple in Jerusalem (the abomination that causes desolation). This will occur in the temple in Jerusalem that doesn't even exist today and after Israel revitalizes the sacrificial system. Please be at peace about this.

17. "...so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name."

But in the evil of Tribulation times people who do not take the visible mark on their forehead or hand will be those Jesus spoke of who had the testimony of Jesus. Believers at that time will be

social outcasts. They will be unable to buy food or clothes or housing, and they will be unable to "sell", in other words to have a job or make money. The mark will designate a person as a worshiper of satan. The lack of the mark clearly identifies someone loyal to Christ. They will be someone the whole evil world will seek to destroy.

18. "This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666."

As he does in Revelation 17:9 John clarifies that understanding this portion of prophecy requires wisdom. In other words, it is difficult to figure out. The number 666 has been studied and written about for centuries. There are many opinions about what it means, but since the meaning is unclear, we won't speculate. However, I will share that many conservative scholars believe the number 6 falls short of the biblical number for God's perfection, which is 7. So, the number 6 could emphasize the imperfection of man - John calls it "...the number of a man...", and since the antichrist is the most imperfect man who will ever live it could indicate that he is the ultimate example of imperfection and sin. Repeating it three times could be in contrast to God who is "Holy, Holy, Holy". The antichrist, in his role of the most sinful and imperfect man will be totally polar opposite of the supreme perfection of God.

Going forward we will see the antichrist mentioned over 30 more times in Revelation. We will also see his evil partner, the false-prophet, working to secure the world's worship of the beast. I hope the last few lessons in chapter 13 have given you an indication of who these puppets of satan will be so we can better understand their role and their eventual destruction.

LESSON 64

Setting the stage for Chapter 14:

The book of Revelation is the story of God's righteous judgment. The final judgment for every remaining non-believer on earth, but specifically for God's chosen people Israel (Genesis 12:1-3). It was Israel to whom God promised prosperity and an eternal kingdom if they would only remain obedient to Him. (Exodus 19:5-7). But try as they may, the people of Israel went through many cycles of disobedience for generation after generation. Periods of separation, open sin and idolatry punctuate their history. Even so, God still chose them as the human vessel through which the Son of God became the Son of Man in order to bring God's grace to all mankind (Luke 1:31-32 / John 1:14). But they failed to heed His message and instead crucified Him, and to this day the people of Israel and the people of the world are for the most part lost. --- The narrow gate remains narrow and the redeemed remain few (Matthew 7:13).

But God is patient and long suffering (2 Peter 3:9) and will in the end of time provide one last opportunity for Israel and the non-believing world to come to Him. This will be the seven year period known as the Tribulation; the time of Jacob's (Israel's) trouble. (Jeremiah 30:7) It is during this final seven year period of earth's existence when Jesus will release a series of devastating judgments against man. It is He who will break seven Seals releasing the antichrist, war, death and pestilence, (Revelation 6). It is He who will allow satan to open the pits of hell to release an army of demons who torture mankind until they beg for death (Revelation 9:1-2). It is He who will unleash four demonic angels bound at the River Euphrates who will command an army of two hundred million of satan's soldiers (Revelation 9:14). It is He who will create great cosmic disturbances and unbelievable natural disasters that will turn rivers to poison, the sea to blood and destroy the world's vegetation (Revelation 8:8-10). It is His angels who will blow seven Trumpet blasts of horrific judgment and pour seven Bowls of God's fury and wrath upon all of His remaining sin-scarred creation. And in the midst of all this judgment and destruction it is He who will allow satan to raise two demonic puppets, the antichrist and the false-prophet, who will create an empire so evil we can scarcely imagine it (Revelation 13 and 18).

But through all of this God will be in control and will continue to offer His grace to anyone who will accept it. He will do this through 144,000 Jewish men empowered to spread the gospel (Revelation 7:4 / 14:1). He will send Two Witnesses from heaven to warn Israel of their impending doom (Revelation 11:3). He will then prepare a place for Israel's remnant to go and then protect them until the judgment has passed (Revelation 12:6 / 12:14). He will send a proclaiming angel to share the gospel -- one last time -- to all mankind (Revelation 14:6-7). And then, as the Mighty Angel will proclaim, "There will be no more delay!" and final judgement will come. (Revelation 10:6).

Chapters 12 and 13 were so dark and foreboding. It is so depressing to think of wars in heaven. Or of satan's fury running wild upon the earth while legions of sinful nations blaspheme God under the leadership of history's most sinful man; a polar-opposite of Christ fueled by a prophet of darkness. A time when the world will be in constant chaos and destruction. The earth and its unredeemed population will literally shake with the righteous judgments of Christ and the unrighteous movements of the antichrist.

But all of that will change in chapter 14 when Jesus, the Holy Lamb, singularly worthy to open the scroll of judgment (Revelation 5:5-6 / Revelation 5:9)) will return. He will return as we have never seen Him before. As a powerful Judge and Warrior King (Revelation 19:11-16). He will reap the earth of all unbelievers and destroy all who have dared reject His Father's grace or failed to accept His personal sacrifice. Chapter 14 starts a long narrative of final judgment, brought about as Jesus, the Risen King, the Righteous Judge and the Holy Warrior of God, who leads His armies to victory. The darkness of chapters 12 and 13 flee from our burdened hearts as chapter 14 brings the promise of eternal light.

O how I have longed for this chapter!

In this lesson, we will focus on verse 1, and in fact, only a portion of verse 1. This verse brings such hope and assurance that our Lord is in total control. It is a powerful verse, first prophesied in the earliest writings that would become God's word. It is our anchor point. It is a promise that no matter how much chaos, sin and turmoil roll across the earth, our Lord and King already knows every event that will occur and orchestrates them to achieve His plan. It is so strengthening for us, His children, to know He is in total control.

Now, let's unpack the power of verse 1.

1. "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion,..."

1.a. - "Then I looked..."

John has just completed his dark and depressing narrative in chapters 12 and 13. There he painfully described war in heaven, satan's fury on earth and the emergence of man's most sinful spore, the antichrist and the false-prophet. Had the story ended there it would be a tale of doom and woe. Just imagining those future events and future players brings a feeling of dread. But "...then..." - after he tells us of these things - John looked and saw a wondrous sight.

1.b. - "...and there before me..."

Here the King James version uses the word "Lo", a term in English meaning "look!" or "see!", and often used as an expression of surprise. A term first used in the Middle Ages to bring urgent attention to a person or event. We find the same term used to describe Christ's first coming, "And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were sore afraid." (Luke 2:9 KJV). To translate this term into more modern English the NIV version uses the phrase, "...and there before me...". This expresses no doubt that what John sees is real. It is "...there..." which means it is physical, and it is "...before me...", which makes it immediate and personal. It is something John sees that changes the mood from one of darkness to one of promise, and shifts our view from the antichrist to the real Christ.

1.c. - "...was the Lamb...,"

The Lamb. A word unbelievers may interpret to represent weakness or helplessness, but to a believer in Christ it is a comforting term. The Lamb is the mighty Son of God, who in His supreme holiness came to earth to give His life - like a Lamb - for the unregenerate people He had created.

- He is the Worthy Lamb. The only one found worthy to enact the judgments of God. (Revelation 5:12)
- He is the Root of David. The earthly royal lineage of Israel's kings. (Matthew 1:6/17 - Isaiah 11:1).
- He is glorious King who will rule all nations with an iron scepter. (Genesis 48:10 / Revelation 12:5 / Revelation 19:11-15).
- He is the Lion of Judah who will fearlessly lead His people to victory. (Genesis 49:9 / Revelation 5:5).
- He is "...the Lamb without blemish or defect.." who gave that perfect life for you and me (1 Peter 1:19).
- He is the one who was "...led like a Lamb to the slaughter..." and did so to fulfill the Father's will. (Isaiah 53:7 / Jeremiah 11:19 / Hebrews 10:9).
- He is "...our Passover Lamb [who] has been sacrificed..." for the sins we committed. (1 Corinthians 5:7).
- He is "...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).
- He is the Lamb who "...became flesh and made His dwelling among us..." so that we would have an intercessor who stands between us and hell's judgment. (Hebrews 7:25 / Romans 8:35 / John 1:14).
- The Lamb is the Lamb in whose blood the saints "...have washed their robes and made them white..." (Revelation 7:14).
- He is the author of the book, the "...Lamb's book of life..." that chronicles the names of those who follow him. (Revelation 21:27).
- He is the final victor, "...the Lamb will triumph over them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers..." (Revelation 17:14 / 3:5 / Luke 10:20 / Daniel 12:1 / Philippians 4:3).
- He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and the End." (Revelation 22:12 / 1:8).
- And in the end, which is also the eternal beginning, we will see, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 22:3-5) -- "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (Revelation 21:23).

- He is Jesus, the Son of God, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Warrior King who has now returned to gather the final believers, reap the world of its unredeemed chaff and to destroy the universe as we know it today. He will cast the antichrist, false-prophet and satan into hell, and He will reign eternally over a New Heaven, a New Earth and a New Jerusalem. (Revelation 21). This is who John now sees. The young apostle whom Jesus loved (John 13:23) is now an old man receiving a vision from God about a future time of victory. John, who walked with Christ, leaned on His shoulder, saw the empty tomb, stayed by Him at the cross, witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and was exiled to a Roman penal colony on a desolate rock in the sea. Now John sees our Savior, our Redeemer, victorious over all evil. Can we even imagine the hope and strength John feels as he sees Jesus the "...Lamb, looking as if it had been slain..."...standing as He had "...at the center of the throne..." in heaven, but now standing triumphal on earth. (Revelation 5:6).

And, if that doesn't stir your soul, move your feet, rock your world and strengthen your faith you might need to read it again or check your pulse.

1.d. - "...standing..."

Here the Lord is standing. No longer sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is in action, standing with His feet on the earth and He is standing victorious. This story we have heard many times before but might not have recognized it as a prophetic promise. In the earliest conical writings of the Bible there is a verse we often quote but may not truly understand. It was spoken by Job, a man of uncompromising faith. A man persecuted by satan, who through his trials teaches us about strength and perseverance like no other (Job 1:8-12). He was stricken in every way, lost all he had and was punished physically to the point of total despair. But he never denied his faith in the Lord. In fact, at the time of his greatest suffering he declared, "I know that my redeemer lives..." (Job 19:25a). This is a verse millions have quoted, and even put into song, but although it gives us strength through the knowledge that our Lord will redeem us from sin, it is the rarely-quoted second half of the verse that gives the most powerful promise, "...and that in the end he will stand on the earth." (Job 19:25b). Because Job stipulates the timing of this promise as "...in the end...", I don't believe this verse applies to the first coming of Christ, but to the second. It is speaking prophetically to the time when Christ will stand on the earth as he prepares to battle satan, the one who caused Job so much pain. Job is looking ahead to the end of days when his Redeemer will return as the Warrior King to exact vengeance on His enemy. This is God's promise to those who believe in Him. It is a time when God will bring holy and righteous wrath on all sinful creation the way He did against Edom for their persecution of Israel, "...the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution, to uphold Zion's cause." (Isaiah 34:8). Job knows this event is yet to come, but he is confident that, "...after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me." (Job 19:26-27). Paul speaks of this event, the time when, "...in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:52). This is the time of the Rapture, when Jesus will return to gather His faithful followers. But Job is also speaking of a later time when Jesus will return to take His place as the Holy Judge.

Job seems to indicate both events. The Rapture - when he will see Jesus face to face, and the Second Coming, when Jesus will stand on the earth at the end of time. This is a hotly debated topic that in itself could be a lengthy study, but we need to understand that the Rapture and the Second

Coming are not the same thing. Often you will hear people pray for the Second Coming of Christ, but that's the event John is talking about in chapter 14; the point when Christ returns to plant His feet upon the earth. That's also what Job sees in the first half of Job 19:25. The time when he sees Christ upon the earth. But as believers, we will be Raptured with Christ and see Him before He returns during the Tribulation. That's what Job is talking about in the second half of 19:25. It is also what Paul is talking about in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, when he says we will be, "...caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.". The difference is clear, during the Rapture believers who are alive or dead will be taken up, "caught up", to meet Jesus "...in the air...". His feet are not on the ground. He comes in the air as opposed to Revelation 14 when He stands with His feet on the earth. Job understood both events. He knew that after he died, "...after my skin has been destroyed...", yet "...in his flesh...", his resurrection body, "I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes.". He also sees a later event when Jesus will plant His feet on solid ground to bring final judgment on all creation.

LESSON 65

Revelation, Chapter 14, Verses 1.b-5

Quick Recap:

In our last lesson we studied the first half of verse 1. Now, we'll continue with the second half of verse 1 through verse 5. This is a continuation of a passage we studied in chapter 7. That lesson introduced us to an amazing group of men; 144,000 Jewish believers who during the Tribulation will be selected from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to spread the gospel to the world. Chapter 7 was the beginning of their ministry. Now in chapter 14 we will see the end.

To get us up to speed let's go back and review a portion of what we studied in chapter 7.

Recap of Chapter 7, Verses 1-8

1. "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. 2. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and sea. 3. Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the forehead of the servants of our God. 4. Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." 5. "From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, 6. from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, 7. from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, 8. from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000."

Let's break this down a bit before we continue with chapter 14:

3. "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the forehead of the servants of our God."

The angels temporarily stop their judgment actions until they have "...sealed... the servants of God. But who are the servants and what is their seal?

4.a. - " Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." The 144,000 are Jewish men who will come to accept Christ during the Tribulation. They will then be selected to spread the gospel to the world and "...sealed..." for protection and to identify them as belonging to the Lord. Pastor David Jeremiah describes these men as "...144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams let loose on the earth to share the message of Jesus." Twelve thousand will be selected from each of the ancient tribes of Israel. (Revelation 7:5-8). They are Israel's descendants from the twelve sons of Jacob (Genesis 49), the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, whose name was changed to "Israel" by God when he wrestled with Jesus at the Fords of Jabbok (Genesis 32:24). From that point on Israel (Jacob) and his sons would be the picture of God's chosen people; His intended messengers to the world. It was Jacob who brought his family to Egypt to escape famine. There he found his long-lost son Joseph who he thought had died years before. It was Joseph and his brothers who would eventually become the nation of Israel, but not before spending

over 400 years in captivity and many years of wandering in the wilderness of disobedience. Once the twelve tribes became a "nation" they went through generation after generation of obedience and disobedience, blessings and curse, unity and separation. It was Israel, the twelve tribes, who eventually crucified their Messiah because they had become so zealously religious that they were faithfully ignorant. The tribes were scattered in AD70 when Israel was destroyed by Rome (the sixth head of satan - Revelation 12), and it was not until 1948 that their nation would be restored. Yet even today Israel is in a cycle of disobedience, and for the most part has lost their tribal recognition.

But God knows who they are and during the Tribulation a portion of Israel will finally come to know Jesus (Zechariah 12:10). From these believers God will call 144,000 evangelists who will spread the gospel through the Tribulation period and lead many to Jesus.

Now with that review let's dig a little deeper in chapter 14.

1. (1.a.) - "Then I looked and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, (1.b.) and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. 2. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. 3. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. 4. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. 5. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless."

1.a./ 1.b - "Then I looked and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, (1.b.) and with Him 144,000 (1.c) who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads."

1.b. - "...and with Him 144,000..."

In our last lesson we studied the first half of verse 1 (1.a). There we see Jesus at His Second Coming, the Holy Warrior with His feet standing firmly on earth and ready for battle. But He is not alone. With Him are the 144,000 Jewish evangelists we first saw in chapter 7. What is so amazing is there are still 144,000. After all of the destruction and wrath cast upon the earth, and the emergence of the antichrist and false-prophet with their intent to, "...wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them." (Revelation 13:7), the 144,000 survived to stand victorious with Jesus. This is because they were protected during their ministry. Recall from chapter 7 that the angel from the east, "...called out in a loud voice..." "...Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a Seal on the forehead of the servants of our God. Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." (Revelation 7:2-4). It is the Seal that identifies them as belonging to God as His chosen ministers and they will be protected.

1.c. - "...who had His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads."

Now we see how they were "sealed": with a mark. As we learned in chapter 13:16-18 the antichrist will demand those who worship him to take the mark of the beast - 666 - on their forehead or right hand. This will not only identify those who worship the antichrist, but more importantly it will identify those who do not. They will be the ones who cannot make a living (Revelation 13:17) and they will be hunted down and killed. Yet the unmarked are among those cited by Jesus in

chapter 20 who, "...had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 20:4). But even though the 144,000 are counted with the faithful they are not martyrs. Instead, they survive the entire Tribulation under the protection of God because they are not unmarked, but are marked by God. Not with a number that means imperfection, but with the name of the Great I AM, the all holy God. It is this mark that designates them as the chosen and protected messengers of God.

2. "And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps."

Three types of sounds are heard here. The roar of rushing waters, the loud peal of thunder and the sound of harps. To find the meaning of these let's go back and begin at chapter 1.

- Rushing waters -- When John saw his first view of Jesus in heaven, he fell to his knees overcome by the power of what he saw. There was the Lamb, with His hair like wool, His eyes like fire, His feet like bronze in a furnace, and "...his voice was like the sound of rushing waters." (Revelation 1:14-15). This is the same voice Ezekiel heard in his prophetic vision of Jesus returning with glory to His temple in the millennial kingdom, "...and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory." (Ezekiel 43:1-2). This is the Messiah, returned to claim His rightful throne. As in Revelation 14:1 and Job 19:25, when He plants His holy feet on earth, He now proclaims, "...Son of Man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live amongst the Israelites forever." (Ezekiel 43:7).
- Loud peal of thunder -- for this sound, let's return to chapter 4. "From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder." (Revelation 4:5). These sights and sounds from God's throne room represent the mood of judgment and the fury of His coming wrath. We saw this in Egypt, "When Moses stretched out his staff towards the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail and lightening flashed down to the ground." (Exodus 9:23). Later at Mount Sinai, "...the people saw thunder and lightning and heard the Trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled in fear." (Exodus 20:18). We've also seen this several times in Revelation. At the announcement of the first Trumpet judgment, "...the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it to earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." (Revelation 8:5), and as the seventh Trumpet blew its destructive force, "...and there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and earthquake and a severe hailstorm."
- The combination of a rushing waters voice and the roar of peals of thunder is the commanding voice of Jesus; the returned Warrior King as He stands on the earth and prepares to pronounce final judgment.
- The "...harpists playing their harps." -- But amidst the chorus of judgment's roar John hears another familiar sound. The sound of harps. An instrument often used in the Bible to signify praise,

"Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on a ten-stringed lyre. Sing him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy." (Psalms 33:2-3).

"Make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing." (Psalms 98:5).

"Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre." (Psalms 150:3).

3. "And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth."

In Revelation chapters 4 and 5, we saw the throne room of God and two groups - the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty Four Elders, each holding a harp and singing a new song of praise. (Revelation 5:8-14). Now we see the 144,000 and they have a song. A "new song", like we saw in chapter 5; a "new song" of the redeemed -- "...and with your blood You purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation..." (Revelation 5:9). These are not heavenly creatures or angels. They are, "...redeemed from the earth..." --- mortal men redeemed from sin through their acceptance of Christ. They are singing this song of praise before the throne of God and within the presence of the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders (the later are arguably the raptured church). It is a song given only to the 144,000. A song no one else can learn. It is known only to these select men who have spread the gospel through the Tribulation period and are now praising God for their salvation and for the return of our King

4.a. - "These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins."

I don't believe this term downplays the role of marriage. Instead, we need to take it in the context in which it is written. These men will live in the most dangerous time on earth. The judgments of God's Seals, Trumpets and Bowls will bring destruction and death we cannot even imagine. In the midst of all this Satan will unleash the antichrist and false-prophet who will seek to destroy anything related to God. The 144,000 will not only live and witness during this period, but they will do so with the name of God on their forehead. They will be protected, but undoubtedly, they will be a target to everyone they meet. -- Paul speaks of this to the church at Corinth. At that time in his life Paul was unmarried. He was like the 144,000 in that he was a Jew carrying the gospel to a largely Gentile world. As a result, he was persecuted, beaten, stoned and imprisoned, but he never gave up. This was a life a danger with the risk of punishment or arrest wherever he went. That's why he felt "...free from concern..." from the perspective that a single man can focus entirely on "...the Lord's affairs...", while a married man must spend time caring for, protecting and providing for his family. Paul was not discounting marriage in any way. Instead, he was simply pointing out that in his case he spread the gospel and suffered persecution without having to worry about the safety of his family. (See 1 Corinthians 7:32-35). I believe that's the case for the 144,000. At a time when their lives are in constant danger they will be singularly focused on Christ.

4.b. - "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes."

And as a result they follow Jesus wherever He goes. At the Festival of Dedication (now called Hanukkah) Jesus was questioned by unbelieving Jews about His claim to be the Messiah. In response He made a comment about those who believe in Him. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:27-28). I believe this verse also applies to the flock of 144,000 standing with Jesus on Mount Zion. They have believed in Him and have followed His guidance through the Tribulation. Going where He sends and spreading His redeeming gospel. They have not faltered or failed. None have denied Him or betrayed Him. They have been true and faithful through the most difficult time in earth's history, and when their task is done, they will stand in victory with our Lord.

4.c. - "They were purchased from among mankind..."

As we saw in verse 3 these men will be "...redeemed from the earth...". These are not some immortal heavenly beings but are men, "...from among mankind..." who have accepted Christ. They are like those in the song of the Twenty Four Elders, "...and with your blood you purchased

for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10).

4.d. - "... and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb."

Firstfruits are the choice offerings presented to God. (Deuteronomy 26:1-15). It is the fruits of Abel, "...the firstborn of his flock...". (Genesis 4:4). It is the spotless lamb offered by the Hebrews in Egypt so that God's judgment would pass over them, (Exodus 12). It was the Spotless Lamb who knew no sin but was sacrificed to bring the grace of God to man. (2 Corinthians 5:21). Likewise, the 144,000 are firstfruits. Selected, chosen and offered as a testimony to the world. An offering of sorts who represent the Holy Lamb of God.

Some commentators contend the term "firstfruits" could also mean the first of many. We know that during the Tribulation some in Israel will recognize Christ as the Messiah and turn to Him. (Revelation 11:13 / Zechariah 12:10). Paul speaks of this in Romans 11 when he says "...all Israel will be saved..." (11:26). That doesn't mean everyone in Israel will be saved just because they are Jewish. In fact, by this point most of Israel will have been destroyed and only a portion will remain," "In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.' " (Zechariah 13:8-9). This speaks to the remnant of Israel, the one-third remnant, who during the Tribulation will, "...look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:10). This is the remnant who will flee into the mountains for protection (Revelation 12:6 and 14). In this sense the 144,000 could be the "first"-fruits of a larger group of Jews who will come to Jesus.

5. "No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless."

They will be human, so they will not be perfect, but they will be sanctified in the presence of the Lord. Zephaniah also speaks of Israel's remnant, and in doing so identifies them in a way that reflects on the character of the 144,000, "They will do no wrong; they will tell no lies. A deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid." (Zephaniah 3:13).

- O that we may be like them.

They are a powerful force to be reckoned with. A force boldly marked with the name of God and protected by His mighty hand. They will defy satan, the antichrist and the false-prophet and spread the gospel across the world without fear of death. They will be unstoppable and unfailing; spreading the indestructible and incorruptible word of God to all that will hear. And in the end, they will stand with Jesus, the victorious Holy Lamb.

LESSON 66

Revelation, chapter 14, verses 6-7

Quick Recap:

In chapter 12 we saw satan, the dragon, as he seeks to destroy Israel. He does this because they are God's chosen nation, the birth people of the true Messiah and the primary focal point of God's final redemptive plan during the tribulation. (Exodus 19:5-6 / Psalms 135:4 / Luke 1:30-33 / Jeremiah 30:7 / Revelation 12:6). As such, they are satan's perpetual enemy and the prime target of his fury. We also saw a point in the future when war will break out in heaven and satan will be permanently banished to the earth by the archangel Michael. (Revelation 12:9). From then until the point he is held in the abyss for one-thousand years the devil will unleash his full fury upon the earth. (Revelation 12:12 / 20:1-3). But during the tribulation, a remnant of Israel will come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. At that time God will protect the remnant and seal them away from the devil's reach. (Revelation 12:6). This will be the fulfillment of the prophecy God gave to Jeremiah so many years before, "How awful that day will be! No other will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob [Israel], but he will be saved out of it." (Jeremiah 30:7 / see also Zephaniah 3:16-17).

In chapter 13 we saw satan select a man from among the world's evil population. This man, the "beast out of the sea"; or more commonly known as the antichrist, will be used to form a worldwide government, economy and military. (Dan 11:36 / 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 / Revelation 6:1 / 13:1-4). His accomplice will be the "beast out of the earth", the false-prophet, who will influence tribulation man to worship the beast as if he were a god. (Matthew 24:11 / Revelation 13:15) These two men, completely possessed by satan, will be the most evil men in history. So evil, they will even raise a demonic army to fight against Jesus Himself. (Revelation 19:19)

But in chapter 14 we see one of the most amazing and encouraging scenes in the Bible. -- John's vision of Jesus, the Lamb of God, returning as the Righteous Judge and Holy Warrior King, and planting His feet firmly upon the earth. (Revelation 14:1). This is the time spoken of by Job when he prophetically declared, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth." (Job 19:25). This is not the Rapture, which will have already occurred by then, (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), but is the second-coming when Christ will physically return to the earth to destroy all evil, establish His millennial kingdom, cast final judgment on all non-believers, obliterate His sin-scarred creation, and re-create the heaven, the earth and Jerusalem in their intended perfect state as an eternal home for His faithful followers --- us! (Revelation 19:11 / 21:1-4). And standing with Him will be 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will have fearlessly spread the gospel throughout the most dangerous period of human history. (Revelation 7:3-8 / 14:1-5).

Now, with that context let's read the content of verses 6-13 and then dig deeper into this encouraging passage.

6. "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heaven, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." 8. A second angel followed and

said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." 9. A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice; "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or their hand, 10. they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name. 12. This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus." 13. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes, says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

6. - "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people."

6.a. - "Then I saw another angel flying in midair..."

The last angel John recorded seeing (other than Michael in chapter 12) was the seventh angel in chapter 11 who sounded the final Trumpet of blasting judgment (Revelation 11:15). This was the seventh of seven Trumpet judgments that were initiated by the seventh Seal which released, "...seven angels who stand before God, and seven Trumpets were given to them." (Revelation 8:2). The effects of the seventh trumpet blast will be seen in chapter 15 when the angel will release seven horrific bowls of final judgment. This gap between chapters 11 and 15 is the focus of our current study - chapters 12-14. These provide additional details on the work of Satan followed by the glorious return of Christ and serve to prepare us for the events we will see in the last part of Revelation.

Now in verse 6, John sees another angel. One we've discussed several times. An angel flying where the whole world can see it - in midair - a phrase coming from the Greek term that means when the sun is at its highest zenith and most visible. John had a similar vision in chapter 8 when, "As I watched, I heard an eagle (KJV "angel") that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe! to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the Trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels." (Revelation 8:13). This is not a proclamation of grace but is a warning of what is yet to come for those who do not turn to God. But now in chapter 14 we see a messenger from God with a different message. In a loud voice he proclaims the gospel of salvation to those who should by now understand the judgment they cannot otherwise escape. We don't know how long this angel will shout his message of hope. Maybe for a short period or maybe for an extended time through the Tribulation. Either way it is clearly a final warning that the offer of God's grace is coming to an end. Other than the crucifixion of Jesus this event is the ultimate example of God's infinite grace and mercy. It will be offered at a time when mankind is at his most disobedient state. When men will "...gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of the pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done." (Revelation 16:11). A time when man will know who God is, and will even know that redemption is possible, yet they will not repent. This will be a time when Satan is at the top of his game, with the antichrist and false-prophet taking his fury to the world.

Throughout the Bible God's grace has manifested itself in uncountable ways. From the day in the garden when He clothed fallen man with a sacrificial offering, to the time He offered to spare Sodom if there were only ten righteous remaining, to the time when the blood of a spotless lamb would ward off the destroying angel, to the time He parted the sea, sent down manna, preserved the people through cycles of disobedience, sent His Holy Son as the Holy Lamb and spread the gospel to the Gentile world for centuries. Now, at the end, He will send a proclaiming angel to announce that salvation is still possible; even to the most sinful of all the worlds populations. (Genesis 3:21 / Genesis 18:31 / Exodus 12:12-13 / John 3:16-17 / Acts 9:15). O how patient God will have been to this point. Even in all of this He will still be willing to forgive trillions of sins and thousands of years of disobedience. He will overlook the failures of man and offer his grace and salvation if they will simply believe and repent. But by this point God's patience will be worn paper thin and His grace will be offered this one last time.

6.b. - "...and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people."

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus speaks of this moment. He warns the disciples of false-prophets who will seek to deceive the world, and He warns of their wickedness and cold hearts. Then He proclaims, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:11-13 / 14 quoted). He was speaking of this event, when the end has come and the gospel is being proclaimed, "...to those who live on the earth...". A gospel of redemption; the "...eternal gospel..." that brings eternal life. This is the gospel of God's infinite mercy, offered even to those who follow the beast. It is mankind's last chance to repent and follow the real Christ instead of an antichrist.

During the tribulation there will be an almost universal hatred of God (Revelation 13:4 / 16:11 / 2 Thessalonians 2:10). Through the antichrist and false-prophet satan will influence man to worship the beast and make war on Christ's followers. Even so, there will be many who are saved during that time.

- We see indications of this in chapter 7 when the multitudes in white robes are standing before God's throne and praising Him for their salvation (Revelation 7:9-18).
- Then in chapter 11 we see a remnant of Israel as they recognize Jesus as their King and give Him glory. (Revelation 11:13 / Zechariah 12:10). This remnant will then be taken by God to a place where they will be protected until satan is removed. (Revelation 12:6 and 14).
- We also know from chapter 13 that the beast will be "...given power to make war against the saints...", and to kill all those who refused to worship the beast. (Revelation 13:7 and 15). This indicates there will be those who refuse to worship the antichrist and instead believe in Jesus. These are among the people Jesus recognizes as those who, "...had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands..." (Revelation 20:4.) So how will people be saved in the post-rapture tribulation - a time when acceptance of Christ will mean almost certain death? Certainly there will be people who heard the gospel prior to the rapture but never made a profession of faith. Once the Rapture occurs many will quickly understand their error and repent. There will also be Bibles and other literature left behind by those who were raptured that may be found by those remaining on earth. But more in keeping with our context, there will also be:
 - 144,000 Jewish ministers selected to share the gospel to the world (Revelation 7:4 / 14:1).
 - Two Witnesses sent to earth by God to witness in Jerusalem but who are also known to the world (Revelation 11:10).

- A proclaiming angel, sent my God to all, "...who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people.". This phrase indicates the gospel will be spread to every person on earth in one final attempt to call the lost to God's redemptive grace.

7. - "He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heaven, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

7.a. - "He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come."

The angel makes the message very clear -- time on earth is up and the hour of God's final judgment has come. He implores them (loudly proclaiming) to fear God and recognize Him as their God with the glory He deserves. This is reminiscent of Israel's reaction at the resurrection of the Two Witnesses when, "...the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." (Revelation 11:12).

To the non-believer the term "...fear God..." should, but usually doesn't, invoke a sense of danger. Certainly, our Lord is a God of infinite love, but the fact is, those who refuse to accept His love and grace through the sacrifice of His Son will be destroyed. God will offer salvation over and over and seek to convict the most hardened hearts, but one day God's righteous judgment and holy fury will throw each one "...into the lake of fire...". (Revelation 20:15). Sadly, most non-believers don't think of this or take it seriously. If they did, they would fear what God will do to them and seek His grace.

But to a believer, the "...fear of God..." transcends human fear and dread and is replaced by recognition and awe. It is our humility before our all-mighty King, it is the awareness of His holy presence in every facet of our lives, it is the view-of and trust-in His infinite glory and limitless power. It is the recognition that without Him we are nothing.

The fear of the Lord is:

- "...the beginning of wisdom..." (Proverbs 9:10).
- For those, "...who find great delight in His commands..." (Psalms 112:1).
- "...hatred of evil..." (Proverbs 8:13).
- "...a fountain of life..." (Proverbs 14:27).
- The desire to, "...walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deuteronomy 10:12).

For a believer the "fear" the Lord is not hiding in a corner to escape His wrath. It is a time to "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice in trembling." (Psalms 2:11). Not the trembling of the beaten-down, but trembling in anticipation of our eternal rejoicing in His glory. It is the knowledge that, "He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them." (Psalms 145:19). This is not a promise to fulfill earthly desires, but to fill us with spiritual strength and trust because we recognize His supreme holiness. It is not a fear of God, but the recognition that, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." (Psalms 56:3). We know this because God promises, "Fear not, I am the one who helps you." (Isaiah 41:13).

Now the proclaiming angel emphasizes the need to not only believe in God, but to stand in awe of His holiness. It is a recognition most people fail to understand today, and it will be so much more difficult to accept during the tribulation.

7.b. - "Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

The angel further simplifies his message to acknowledge the one who created all things. A distinction Paul made to the church at Rome in a prophetic way to show that even the recognition of creation itself should be enough to convince us of the existence of a one-true God, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godliness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." (Romans 1:18-20). But redemption is more than just simple recognition that God exists. We know tribulation man will recognize both the Father and the Lamb. In chapter 6 they cried out to the earth to save them, "...from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Revelation 6:16). Even at the very end they will "...cursed the God of heaven...", "...but they refused to repent of what they had done." (Revelation 16:11). Instead, the angel clarifies the people must "...worship..." the creator. This will be counter to the commands of the false-prophet who forces those on earth to worship the beast. (Revelation 13:12-17).

But worship of God indicates more than knowledge of God. In today's "church" there are many forms of worship, ceremony, ritual and observance that are not true worship. They are man's desire to "do" something to pay homage to God. But God is very clear that He wants our true love in worship, not our efforts, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6).

Worship is an act of humility before God. Whether in song, prayer, thought or action, it is the soulful and internal proclamation of our love for Him. In this sense worship is:

- When, "I will exalt you and praise your name..." (Isaiah 25:1).
- "Praising the Lord, "...my soul, all my inmost being, praise his holy name." (Psalms 103:1).
- When, "My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long." (Psalms 71:8).
- The attitude we have when, "...earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you..." (Psalms 63:1).
- It is when we "...bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." (Psalms 95:6),
- As "I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land." (Psalms 143:6)

In the modern church we have worship time, worship songs and worship pastors. This enables a time of congregational "worship". A time to come before God and jointly exclaim His name as a unified body. But how often is our worship in name alone. I often find myself singing a song of praise yet my mind is on an issue at work, or at home, and I'm not really worshipping. I'm singing a song to God or about God but my heart and soul is not focused entirely on God. I'm sure we all find ourselves there from time to time, so it's probably something we all need to work on.

The proclaiming angel will bring God's redemptive message to the world. He will speak the gospel of grace and mercy but he will also extol the virtues of fear and worship in his message. It is the same gospel we should all be sharing today to a darkening world.

LESSON 67

Revelation, chapter 14, verses 8-13

Quick Recap of Verses 6-7:

In our last lesson we studied verses 6 and 7. There we saw the proclaiming angel spreading the gospel of Jesus to the entire world. His message will be simple; time on earth is quickly coming to an end, but God, in His infinite mercy, will still be willing to provide redemption and salvation one last time. At that point, the world will be in total chaos and destruction as the Lord brings final judgment on the earth and mankind. This will be a time of, "...great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again." (Matthew 24:21 / Daniel 12:1). Even so, God is merciful and as Gabriel prophesied to Daniel, "But at that time your people - everyone whose name is found written in the book - will be delivered." (Daniel 12:1). These are those Jesus spoke of who will be saved out of the tribulation because they chose not to follow the antichrist. (Matthew 24:22 and 31 / Revelation 6:17). Even in this horrible time of God's righteous judgment and destruction He will present the gospel to the world so that all mankind has one more opportunity to turn to Him. He will do this through 144,000 Jewish evangelists (Revelation 7:1-8 / 14:1-5), the Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:3-14) and by the proclaiming angel we saw in verses 6-7. This angel appears to be the last to proclaim the gospel message to the whole world. A world who should by that point recognize God's mercy as a way to escape eternal judgment. But sadly, most will not.

Now, with that context let's unpack verses 8-13.

8. "A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." 9. A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice; "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or their hand, 10. they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name. 12. This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus." 13. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes, says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

8. "A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

Tragically, the redemptive message of the proclaiming angel will not be heeded by the majority on earth, so a second and third angel will follow the first. They will announce a warning of wrath for those who do not repent. The second angel declares the empire of the antichrist is fallen. This is the demonic world-wide political, military, economic and religious empire of the antichrist - supported by the false-prophet - that is here called "Babylon the Great". A shortened version of the term used in chapter 17, "Babylon the Great the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth" (Revelation 17:5). No more sinful name could be applied to the ultimate sinful kingdom. But why is the antichrist's empire called Babylon? All false doctrine and pagan religion

was born in the region of Babel. It was there man sought to make a name for himself that was greater than God. But the Lord destroyed their plans and as punishment scattered man across the earth; taking with them their pagan religions. (Genesis 11:3-9). Now, we see the end of time when the sinful empire of satan, the antichrist and the false-prophet also will be called Babylon. A name that symbolizes all ungodly beliefs and the sin of an ungodly world. An empire Christ will ultimately destroy.

We will discuss Babylon's fall in more detail in chapter 16. There we will see the seven Bowls of final judgment as they are poured out on mankind and the world. Then in chapter 17 we'll see the antichrist's empire described as a woman (a harlot) sitting on the beast (the antichrist) as he seeks to control the world and destroy God's people. In chapters 18 and 19 we'll see man's pitiful lament over the destruction of the sinful empire. But their cries will be drowned-out by a chorus of "Hallelujah" from heaven celebrating its fall. And later, in chapter 19 we'll see Jesus as He destroys the leaders of Babylon, the beast and the false-prophet, and throws them into hell for eternity.

Now in verse 8 comes the second angel's proclamation. His is not a message of hope and salvation like the first angel, but is a message of doom. He proclaims that "...the nations..." (the world) have drunk the "...maddening wine of her adulteries...". This simply means, the world has prostituted themselves to worship of the antichrist and have become drunk on the sin of his empire. As a result, the harlot kingdom of the antichrist - Babylon - will come to an end and all unrepentant mankind will come to an end with her.

9, 10, 11. -- 9. "A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice; "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or their hand, 10. they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name."

If the message of the second angel was not clear enough, the third angel will further clarify exactly what is about to happen and who it is going to happen to.

9. "A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice; "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or their hand,...".

Chapter 13 tells us, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast..." (Revelation 13:8). This will happen when the false-prophet deceives the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:14) and force, "...all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads..." (Revelation 13:16). This mark will be 666, "...the number of a man..." (Revelation 13:18). A mark identifying who worships the antichrist and who does not. Now the third angel clarifies it is they who will be the focus of God's final destruction -- anyone who worships the beast and has accepted his mark. He proclaims "...in a loud voice..." the final sentencing for those found guilty of not accepting God's final offer of redemption. When that happens, I suspect those who hear his proclamation will look at the mark on their hand or on their forehead and know exactly who he is speaking to.

10. "...they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb...."

God's wrath is described as a cup. A reservoir of righteous punishment and destruction. This is not a careless outburst of anger from God, but is the planned, calculated and divine wrath of a Righteous Judge. This is the wrath, but to a much lesser degree, felt by a disobedient Israel (Isaiah 51:17). It is the wrath, "In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs." (Psalms 75:8). It is, "...this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them." (Jeremiah 25:15-16). God has been clear throughout time that His wrath will fall on those who refuse to turn to Him. The cup is symbolic of this wrath, just as it was when Jesus asked, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42). Jesus knew He must take the cup. He did this obediently because He so loved His creation that He came to the world to take the wrath on Himself that was intended for us. He did this so that, "...by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone...", and in doing so the whole world might be saved (Hebrews 2:9 / John 3:17). Frankly, the cup of tribulational wrath should not even be needed. Jesus has already taken the cup of wrath intended for man and endured it Himself. Had mankind accepted our Lord's self-sacrifice, then every person's sins for all time would have been covered. Instead, man rejected God's gift, and will continue to reject it, even when the proclaiming angels clearly explain the eternal consequences. Then they, "...will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.". God's wrath at this point will come as His full divine fury. It will not be mixed with mercy or grace but will be full strength and completely destructive --- and it will be eternal.

11. "And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." Hell is eternal. It is not a place of short-term extreme suffering that will someday come to an end, but is a place of eternal agony and pain. (Luke 16:24). This will be the eternal judgment of an eternal God. A time when Jesus will act with, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:12). When, "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty..." (Revelation 19:15). This is the time when Jesus will, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested." (Revelation 14:15-16). Hell is the place where in the end, "Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15). The same place where, "...the devil who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false-prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:10).

But for us, true believers in Christ, there will be an eternity spent in worship of God's glory. An eternal, "...dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the older things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4). -- Hallelujah.

12. - "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus."

This is a call to endure and persevere. At a future time when believers will be hunted down and killed the Lord will ask them to endure patiently, as His divine plan unfolds. But this verse is not restricted to tribulation man. Throughout time God's people have endured persecution, as they do today in many parts of the world. Yet for the most part American Christians have been spared open persecution. Unfortunately, this has often made us comfortable and complacent. To the point many "christian" denominations have abandoned a Biblically-based Christ-alone salvation and replaced it with rituals and ceremonies, or even worse, the promise of earthly prosperity. It is these who are defined by Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23 as those He will cast away at judgment. But lately, many Christians, even in America feel under attack. The open acceptance of immorality, legislation to legalize sin and even recent political maneuvering may have left us wondering what is going on. Yet, we cannot show a lost word any hysteria or fear. We too must show the world we have "...patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus." In this sense what does keeping His commands and remaining faithful mean? It means we show the world a church who knows God is in control, a church who shows restraint yet strength, a church who shares the gospel of hope to a world looking for hope. To do this we must be in God's word daily, and we must be alert to God moving through events rather than wondering if God is aware of what is happening. This is the endurance our Lord is calling for. A body of believers whose actions are predicated on the gospel and a testimony that glorifies God. A people who act measurably and calmly because we know our King is the King of kings and our God is in total control.

13. "Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes, says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

Paul assures us that, "...the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). This is the promise given to us in the pre-Tribulational church age. Believers who will be raptured by God prior to the final wrath of God. This is the promise Jesus made to the faithful church, "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 3:10). Yet, during the Tribulation Jesus will ask the faithful few to patiently endure. Even those who accept Christ and die during the Tribulation will know they too are promised "...rest from their labor...".

Given what our future brothers and sisters will have to endure for the name of Christ, we must show the world we can do the same.

LESSON 68

Revelation, Chapter 14, verses 14-20

Quick Review of Chapter 14 to this point:

In verses 1-5 we saw John's vision of Christ's Second Coming. This gives us a preview of what we'll see in later chapters when the Messiah returns as the Warrior King and Righteous Judge to retake His fallen creation from those who would dare spoil it with sin. This is the fulfillment of Job's prophecy that our Redeemer lives, and in the end will stand with His feet on the earth. (Job 19:25). With our glorious King we also see 144,000 converted Jews. Men who were saved during the Tribulation and represent each tribe of God's ancient chosen people. They, along with the Two Witnesses, will have proclaimed to the world that God's grace and mercy are still available to those who will repent.

Verses 6-13 reveal three angels. The first joins the 144,000 and Two Witnesses to share the gospel to the whole world. This is a proclamation of salvation and is offered to anyone who will accept. But few will, so God sends a second angel who declares woe to all who follow the beast and his evil empire. He does so by announcing the soon fall of Satan's empire, "Babylon the Great", the future one-world government and religion, led by the antichrist. It is aptly named after the place and the people of Babel, who in ancient times gathered together to come against God, just as the antichrist and the world will do in the end. (Genesis 11). A third angel will clarify the message of the second angel. Those to be destroyed are all who worship the antichrist and will take his mark. They will face the full undiluted wrath of God's final judgment. A judgment that will translate into an eternity in hell.

But amongst these announcements of impending death and destruction of the non-believing world, God brings hope to His children. In verse 13 He implores believers living during the tribulation to have patient endurance, keeping His commands and remaining faithful to our Holy King Jesus. But that command is not limited to the Tribulation Saints and is a command we would all do well to follow in today's world as well.

Now in the end of chapter 14 John provides a prelude of what is about to occur. As the final and most dreaded judgments begin, we see Jesus, glorified and holy as He prepares to reap the world of all sin and sinners.

With that context let's unpack the amazing scripture in verses 14 through 20.

14. "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was seated on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16. So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. 17. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." 19. The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and

threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."

14. "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand."

14.a. - "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud...,"

As we will see later in this verse, "...a white cloud..." is symbolic of the presence, majesty and glory of the Lord. This is a common theme throughout the Bible:

- When Israel was in the wilderness for forty years the presence of God was presented to them as a fire at night and a cloud in the day. "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night." (Exodus 13:21).
- We know the Lord was in the pillar of cloud because when the Egyptians sought to follow the fleeing Israelites across the parted sea, "...the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw them into confusion." (Exodus 14:24).
- Later, when Moses pitched his Tent of Meeting outside the Israelites' camp so the Lord would come to meet with him, "...the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses"..."The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." (Exodus 33:9 and 11).
- Daniel's vision of the end-times millennial King is very similar to John's view, "...I looked, and there before me was one like the son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given all authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14 / 2 Samuel 7:13). This is a prophecy of Christ's return, which as with John's account uses the imagery of a cloud to signify the glory and power of Christ. Daniel's vision also speaks of Christ's everlasting kingdom; the millennial kingdom Jesus will bring to the earth, but beyond that, it also speaks of the eternal kingdom, the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem where God will dwell, "...among the people, and he will dwell with them. (Revelation 20:5 / 21:3).
- Jesus Himself spoke of the same event in His Olivet Discourse, "And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30).
- Jesus used similar terminology just prior to His crucifixion when He was being interrogated at the home of Caiaphas the high priest. The wicked leaders wanted Jesus to confess He was the Messiah so they could accuse Him of blasphemy. It was His answer to their question that prompted the high priest to proclaim, "He is worthy of death." -- "I charge you under oath by the living God. Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God. 'You have said so,' Jesus replied. 'But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Matthew 26:63-65). Here Jesus is speaking in the future sense - "...From now on..." and proclaims that in the future the world will see Him coming to earth "...on the clouds of heaven...". This is prophetic of the scene John is telling us about here in chapter 14.
- Jesus explains this future event in more detail in Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse. You'll note that the descriptions He uses follow exactly what we have seen so far in Revelation,

"...There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken prisoner to all the nations. (Revelation 6:4 and 11 / 13:10). Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (Romans 11:26 / Revelation 11:25). There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. (Revelation 8:12). On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. (Revelation 9:6). People will faint in terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (Revelation 1:7 / 14:1) - (Luke 21:25-28).

In each case the imagery of a cloud represents the presence and glory of God. From the very beginning when He watched over His people, until the end when we see Him return as the glorious Warrior King to bring final judgment on the earth. Jesus is seen in this view in His majesty as He "...rides on a swift cloud..." (Isaiah 19:1) to carry out His mission of wrath. He is the Almighty King returning to retake what is rightfully His. For this we should, "...sing praise of His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before Him - His name is the Lord. (Psalms 68:4). And in this role as the Holy Judge, He will, "...makes the clouds His chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes wind His messengers, flames of fire His servants." (Psalms 104:3). This is Jesus the Christ, the God who put on flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14) so that He could be the sacrifice for the sins of man. Now in John's vision the time of mercy and grace is quickly coming to an end. It will be the time when Jesus will return to reap the earth of all non-believers. And those whom He will reap will see Him just as John did, "Look, He is coming with the clouds," and "every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him"; and all the peoples on earth "will mourn because of Him." So shall it be! Amen." (Revelation 1:7 / Daniel 7:13 / Zechariah 12:10).

14.b. - "...and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man..."

But how do we know it is Jesus that John sees among the clouds? In several of the verses cited above we see reference to the terms "Lord", "clouds" and "Son of Man" all linked together. Clearly, Daniel's vision was of the coming Messiah and he uses the term Son of Man to describe the Lord. Likewise, in chapter 1 of Revelation John has an astonishing view of Jesus and describes Him the same way, "...and among the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man, dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest." (Revelation 1:13). This is Jesus, the promised Messiah, who is the Son of God (John 3:16 / Matthew 3:17 / Mark 5:7), but who came to earth through a human mother and as such is a Son of Man, so that the Son of God would be among us. (Luke 1:26-35 / John 1:14). This is also a term Jesus used over 80 times in the New Testament to describe Himself. It is a unique term that helps us understand the profound reality that God, in the role of the Son, came to earth and lived in the role of a man, so that He could become the sacrifice for man's sin. "For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service of God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." (Hebrews. 2:17).

14.c. - "... with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand."

In this view Jesus wears a crown. Generally, two Greek words are used in the Bible to describe a "crown" --- "diadema" which is the royal crown of a king, and "stephanon", which is the crown of a victor; like the wreath of leaves worn by the winner of ancient athletic event. Paul uses the same term when talking to Timothy about a victor's crown (2 Timothy 2:5), and it is a victor's crown promised to the church at Smyrna if they would be faithful to God. (Revelation 2:10). The use of

"stephanon" here in Revelation recognizes Jesus as the Victor in the upcoming battle with satan. (Revelation 17:14 / 19:11-16).

In His hand is a sharp sickle. No longer is the Lord carrying a shepherd's staff to lead His flock, but instead He has a sickle used for the harvest. A sickle is a long curved blade on a curved staff. It's used to cut grain or other plants near the ground by using a wide sweeping motion. In this sense Jesus is the reaper and will symbolically use His sickle to cut-down, harvest and destroy those who have not accepted His gift of salvation. Additionally, I think the use of the term "...sharp..." indicates the effectiveness of the sickle and of Christ's judgments. A dull sickle will perform poorly and leave much of the stalk uncut. But here Jesus has a sharp sickle that will cut quickly and efficiently -- so that nothing will remain standing.

15. "Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was seated on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

Several times in Revelation we've heard a "...loud voice..." coming from heaven with a judgment command. In this case we see "...another..." angel coming from the throne room of God in the "...temple..." of heaven (Revelation 4:1-6) to announce "...in a loud voice..." the time for final judgments has come. Sadly, the long-enduring patience of God (2 Peter 3:9) has come to an end, the time of the Gentiles has been fulfilled (Romans 11:25) and the remnant of Israel is now protected by God (Revelation 12:6 and 14). With the exception of those who refuse to worship the antichrist (Revelation 13:15 / 20:4), all that is left at this point will be the people who have rejected Christ and who worship the beast (Revelation 13:12). This signifies the beginning of the end for mankind as we know it today --- the crop is ripe for the reaper to harvest.

So how will this reaping occur? From chapter 14 through the end of Revelation there are several remaining judgment actions that will in-effect "reap" the world of satan and sinners:

1. The seven Bowl judgments. - The first of these will be released by the seventh Trumpet judgment (Revelation 11:15 / 16:1). These will be the most horrific judgments of all as God pours His final Tribulation destruction on all creation. (Revelation 16:1-21).
2. The Battle of Armageddon. - The antichrist will bring his armies into open combat with Jesus. There they will be destroyed and the antichrist and false-prophet thrown into hell forever and satan thrown into the abyss for one thousand years. (Revelation 16:16 / 19:17-21 / 20:1-3).
3. The post-millennial kingdom destruction of satan's final army. (Revelation 20:7-10).
4. The Great White Throne Judgment. - The final and forever judgment of all lost non-believers and their sentencing to hell for eternity. (Revelation 20:11-15).

I believe all of these final judgment actions could be considered part of Christ's action of reaping. This is the time when, as the mighty angel announced, "There will be no more delay." (Revelation 11:6).

16. "So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested."

We must approach this verse with both grief and joy.

But why grief? Those who Jesus initially reaps will be the world's remaining post-rapture, pre-millennial disobedient population. Undoubtedly hundreds of millions of people who will have survived the prior Tribulation judgments will now be subjected to the most horrific destruction we could ever imagine -- or more likely, are unable to imagine. Depending on the timing of the

Rapture these may be people we know today. But even if not, they will be Dad's, Mom's, teenagers, young adults, grandparents, friends, family, and other people in every walk of life who will have rejected God's gift of grace. Most will have been alive before the short Tribulation begins and therefore will have missed the Rapture. Many of them -- in their pre-rapture life -- might have been church-goers, religious people, and really great folks who simply failed to accept Christ as the only way to true redemption (John 14:6 / Matthew 7:21-23). Now, near the end of the Tribulation they will have ignored the woe-giving angels (Revelation 8:13), the evangelistic message of the 144,000 (Revelation 7:3-8 / 14:1-5), the warning of the Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:3-6) and the final offer of the gospel by the proclaiming angel (Revelation 14:6). Then they will stand in the nakedness of their sin, marked by the beast, unrepentant, unforgiven and without hope.

But why joy? Joy in the sense that by this point in Biblical history those of us who are true believers in Christ will have been raptured and returned with Him for the final destruction of sin. (Revelation 19:14). Shortly after this point Christ will be seated on His millennial throne, and after a thousand years will usher us into an eternity with Him. (Revelation 21:3).

We must remember, the more people we witness to, and the more who accept the Lord as their Savior, means more will join us in that glorious eternity with God. --- We must witness to them, lead them to Christ, and literally snatch them from the fires of hell.

17. "Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle."

The use of "...another angel..." emphasizes the continuous parade of angels into God's judgment actions. The reference to "...the temple in heaven..." clarifies that these angels are coming from God's temple - His throne room. This angel also has a sickle and will participate in the destruction of mankind. In this role he reminds me of the destroying angel in Egypt who was also sent to reap those who did not have the blood of the spotless lamb on the door-posts of their homes. This too was clearly a judgment of God. (Exodus 12:12-13).

18. "Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe."

In chapter 8 we saw, "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and hurled it on the earth..." (Revelation 8:5). This action will announce the start of the seven Trumpet blasts of God's judgment. It's not entirely clear if the angel in chapter 8 is the same angel in chapter 14, but the reference to being in charge of the fire coming "...from the altar..." certainly indicates it might be.

But no matter, this angel also calls to the reaper to take His sickle and gather the ripe harvest. But instead of using the imagery of grain being harvested with a sickle, it uses the fruit of the vine; the grape. This will be judgment shifting to grapes; a fruit, [the people] who will be plucked from the vine of the earth to be crushed.

19. "The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath."

This event is spoken of in chapter 19 when the Warrior King Jesus gathers the remainder of non-believers - like a crop of grapes - for their final destruction. "Out of His mouth comes a sharp

sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." (Revelation 19:15). -- A winepress is a large vessel used to convert grapes to juice. It was commonly a large depression in a rock or even a large barrel. In either case grapes were put in the vessel and pressed; usually with your feet or a large weight to smash and press the grapes to extract all of its juice. The Bible uses this term in several places to illustrate the judgment of God, and to help us picture a violent stamping and smashing until everything is destroyed:

- "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood splattered all my clothing." (Isaiah 63:3)
- "The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah. (Lam 1:15)
- "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness! Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel." (Joel 3:13-16). --- Sound familiar?

20. "They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia."

Mention here of "...the city..." [Jerusalem] points to the winepress event as the Battle of Armageddon. This is when the antichrist will bring his armies against Jesus, "then they gathered the kings together to a place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (Revelation 16:16). Armageddon is a real place known as "The Plain of Megiddo" or Har Megiddon. (Judges 5:19). It is the place where the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III defeated the Canaanite Coalition in 1468 BC. Where Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites (Judges 4). Where Josiah died in battle against Pharaoh Neco II in 609 BC (2 Kings 23:29). Where Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 7). And, where the British army defeated the Turks in 1917. Napoleon said it was the greatest battlefield he had ever seen. --- But now, in the end of time, "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." (Revelation 17:14). "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false-prophet who had performed miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh." (Revelation 19:19-21).

We will study these events in more detail when we get to chapters 16 and 19, but for now rejoice in the knowledge that Jesus will return to destroy all evil and evil doers. -- "For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:30-31).

The imagery of the battle is profound. Death and destruction will be so complete the blood of those stamped in the winepress of God's vengeance will rise to a horse's bridle (about 4 feet) in a battle that will rage across 1,600 stadia - about 185 miles - or basically, across the length of Israel.

These are tough verses. Scripture that provides a view of our Lord Jesus in the role of Royal Judge and Executioner. It describes actions and events we can barely comprehend, because it describes the final destructive actions of an All Holy God. This should spurn us all to share the gospel so that everyone who accepts Him as Savior will not be found among those destroyed by Him.

LESSON 69

Revelation, chapter 15, Verses 1-2a

Quick Recap:

As we've seen, God's tribulational judgment comes in twenty-one significant actions:

- First, Jesus breaks each of seven "Seals". As the scroll opens each successive Seal will release God's initial judgments -- the antichrist, war, famine, pestilence, death and great cosmic disturbance. (Revelation 6:1-12). The seventh and final Seal judgment will start with a short period of silence in heaven but will then release seven angels who will orchestrate the next series of seven even greater judgments. (Revelation 8:1).
- Those seven angels will bring seven "Trumpet" judgments. These will be the great blasts of destruction and torment described in chapters 8 and 9. Their actions will begin to destroy a third of the earth's vegetation, rivers and seas, darken the sun, moon and stars, and release two hordes of demons upon the earth to torment man. Then in chapter 11 we see the blowing of the seventh and final Trumpet judgment but we do not immediately see its destructive power. (Revelation 11:15). Instead, we saw the Twenty Four Elders sing a song of praise in anticipation for what is about to come (Revelation 11:16-18). This was followed by chapters 12, 13 and 14 which take a pause in the destruction narrative to give us details about satan, the antichrist and the false-prophet. Then we see an amazing sight; a prelude of John's vision of the Second Coming; Lamb on the earth, the proclaiming angels and the coming of Jesus as the Warrior, Judge and Reaper.
- Now in chapter 15 we finally see the outcome of the seventh Trumpet. Just as the seventh Seal judgment released the first Trumpet judgment, now the seventh Trumpet judgment releases the first of seven "Bowl" judgments. These are the final judgment actions of God as he pours death and horrific destruction upon all creation. These are the righteous actions of a righteous and holy God as He reaps creation of the sin and sinners who have doggedly rejected His grace. Chapter 15 is a short chapter and serves as a prelude to chapter 16. In 16 we will see the actual pouring of the seven "Bowl" judgments, but first chapter 15 gives us insight into why these final judgments are necessary.

Now, within that context let's read chapter 15 and unpack verses 1-2a

1. "I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is completed. 2. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God 3. and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. 4. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." 5. After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple -- that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law -- and it was opened. 6. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. 7. Then one of the Four Living Creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden Bowls filled with the wrath of

God, who lives forever and ever. 8. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."

1. "I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is completed."

1.a. - "I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign:..."

Again John says "...I saw...". This indicates more than just a vision. It is not imagined. It is physical, and not only gives John a clear view of what is to come, but brings him into the most inner sanctuary of God's most holy place. But this is not John's first view of heaven, nor is it the last "...sign..." he will be given:

- In chapter 4 John was given a wondrous view of God's throne room, the Four Living Creatures, the Twenty Four Elders and the heavenly host (4:2-11).
- In chapter 5 he saw the Lamb standing before the throne of God as He received the scroll of judgment from the Father's hand (5:7).
- In chapter 6 he saw the souls under the altar calling to God to avenge His persecuted children. (6:9)
- In chapter 7 he saw the great multitude of believers standing before the throne of God. (7:9)
- In chapter 8 he saw seven angels with seven Trumpets and another angel with fire from the altar of heaven. (8:1-3)
- In chapter 11 John saw heaven opened, and within, the temple of God and the ark of the covenant (11:19).
- In chapter 12 he saw two separate "...signs...". The woman Israel and satan the dragon. (12:1-4).
- In chapter 13 he saw the "...great signs..." of the false-prophet. (13:13).
- In chapter 14 he saw an angel come from the temple of God who will proclaim the time has come for final judgment when Jesus will reap the earth of all sinners. (14:15-20).

Signs:

- In chapter 16 he will see "...demonic signs..." performed by impure spirits. (16:14).
- Then in chapter 19 he will see delusionary signs of the captured false-prophet. (19:20).

Now in chapter 15 John is given another view into heaven. Here he sees the final seven Bowl-bearing judgment angels, the interior of God's temple, and those who will come to Christ during the Tribulation. He identifies these sights as "...signs...", but they are so amazing it is difficult to put them into words. He describes them as "...marvelous...", a term derived from the Greek word "Thaumaston", which can mean "wonderful" and "amazing". It is the same word Peter used to describe all believers who have been, "...called out of darkness into his wonderful [thaumaston] light." (1 Peter 2:9). John's amazing view of heaven brings depth and glorious substance to what he sees, and the "signs" provide more detail to help us better understand the imagery being used to describe the events about to occur.

1.b. - "...seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is completed."

The "sign" John sees here points to the final judgment actions of God. These are initiated by seven angels who will be given authority to administer seven horrific actions of destruction. These actions, called "...plagues...", are the seven "Bowl" judgments that will pour God's wrath upon creation. They will be the last of twenty-one judgments that started with the seven Seals, led into the seven Trumpets and now end with the seven Bowls. With these, the reaping of the earth (Revelation 14:1-20) will be complete and God's promise will be fulfilled - "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve." (Leviticus 26:21). The "...plagues..." John mentions here are not diseases. This is a term derived from the Greek word "plegas" which means great blows or punishing stripes and terrible wounds. Using it describes a great force of horrific destruction. It is the same word used in Acts 16:23 to describe the severe flogging of Paul and Silas, and in Luke 10:30 it describes the beating of the man rescued by the Good Samaritan. We will see the same term again in Revelation 16:9 and 22:18.

It may be hard for us to understand, but the wrath of God is righteous and justified. It illustrates the very nature of God because He cannot tolerate sin (Habakkuk 1:13). His wrath should come as no surprise because after the very first sin God declared to Adam that sin would bring certain death. (Genesis 2:17). Then, throughout the Bible God clearly shows both His grace and His wrath will be meted-out as a result of our obedience or disobedience to His commands. (Deuteronomy 28). Paul explains this very clearly, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness..." (Romans 1:18). The result of this sin is certain death, but even so man will continue to disobey God through his sin which must result in God's inevitable wrath. For "Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death." (Romans 1:32), man will continue to sin. This requires judgment. The judgment of a, "...righteous Judge, a God who displays wrath every day. If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows." (Psalms 7:11-13). --- And yet, God judges fairly (1 Peter 1:17), and even in His righteous and holy wrath God spares all who believe. (John 3:16 / Romans 5:8). For even though unrepentant sin brings death, He still offers redemption to all because, "...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23). Each and every one of us deserves death for even one sin, but God in His infinite mercy sent the Son Jesus to take our sin to the cross so that He, "...who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21). In this way "...the evil man is spared from the day of calamity, that he is delivered from the day of wrath." (Job 21:30).

By the time John sees the final wrath of God about to be poured out on all creation, most who remain on earth will be the final vestige of sinful man to turn-up their nose to God and reject His offer of redemptive grace. It will be these people, and their demonic leaders, the antichrist and false-prophet, who are about to suffer the most horrific wrath God has ever put on man. This is the complete and final wrath prophesied by Zephaniah, "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. "I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away birds of the air and fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth." (Zephaniah 1:2-3). This is the time spoken of by Isaiah when, "...the day of the Lord is coming - a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger - to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it." (Isaiah 13:9). This is God's holy wrath, from the Greek

"thymos"; a word meaning indignation and anger. This is the righteously justified indignation of God. The anger and action poured out on those who have for thousands of years rejected his offer of grace, and still, even in the end, will continue to reject Jesus. Paul uses the same term to describe God's judgment mood against the unrepentant, "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." (Romans 2:8). We see this most clearly outside of Revelation in one of the best illustrations of God's wrath. The book of Nahum describes God's judgment of the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in the sixth century BC. It is the story of God's complete and unrelenting destruction of a people who turned away from His gift of redemption. Here we see the character of a judgment God who is a, "...jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him." (Nahum 1:1-6).

This is the power and unlimited extent of God's wrath. It will be a time when, as God declares, "For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son - both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel 18:4). It is the time when those who have rejected God will now come under His power, "For the Lord has a day of vengeance..." (Isaiah 34:8). It is the time when God, the one who is slow to anger, will declare, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, and again, "The Lord will judge his people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:30-31).

2. "And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God...

2.a. - "And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire..."

In chapter 4 John was given a wondrous view of heaven and God's throne room. Of the place made with precious Jews and of the Twenty-Four Elders dressed in white. He saw flashes of lightening, peals of thunder and seven blazing lamps. And then he saw "...before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal." (Revelation 4:1-6 paraphrased). Moses too saw God's surroundings in a similar way, "Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself." (Exodus 24:10). This is similar to the vision Ezekiel was given of "...what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome. (Ezekiel 1:22). Now in chapter 14 John again sees the glorious sea of crystal that serves as the floor for God's throne. But this time it is "...glowing with fire."

- This may represent the mood of God at this point in judgment -- a refracting of the lighting John saw surrounding God's throne. (Revelation 4:5).
- Or maybe the seven blazing lamps that represent the seven spirits of God. (Revelation 4:5).
- Possibly, as the writer of Hebrews says, it reflects the fact that, "...our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29).

- Or, more specifically as Moses saw, maybe it is "...a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." (Hebrews 10:27 / Exodus 3:2 / Revelation 20:9).
- Possibly a reference to God's plan for final judgment which will include, "...fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:7).
- Or maybe it is a reflection from the fire of the altar used to initiate the seven Trumpet judgments. (Revelation 8:5).

But whatever the source may be, John's view of God's throne room is now fiery with the impending and final judgments about to come.

LESSON 70

Revelation, chapter 15, Verses 2b-4

Quick Recap:

In chapter 15 verse 1 and 2a.

1. "I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is completed. 2. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire..."

Chapter 15 acts as an introduction to chapter 16. There we will see the last seven tribulational judgments known as "Bowls". These represent the "pouring out" of God's final judgment on all creation. They are the last actions that will bring the Tribulation to a violent close and usher-in Christ as the Victorious King who will then rule on earth during the thousand year Millennial Kingdom. In verse 1 we saw John's view of God's throne room and its amazing crystal platform. We also saw seven angels who will be selected to pour the seven Bowls of judgment as they emerge from God's amazing inter-sanctum in heaven.

And with that, let's continue chapter 15 with verses 2b-4.

2.b. - "...and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name."

John's view into heaven reveals the "sea" of crystal on which God's throne seems to sit., "Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal." (Revelation 4:6). But this time the platform John sees has the appearance of "...glowing with fire...". We discussed several opinions of what this may mean in last week's lesson, but to me it seems most likely to reflect the judgment mood of God as He prepares to destroy sinful man as, "...a consuming fire..." (Exodus 24:17 / 2 Peter 3:7 / Hebrews 10:27 - 12:29). But now John sees more than just the platform. Standing beside the sea -- indicating near the throne of God -- are those who have, "...been victorious over the beast and its image and over its name." These are the people who will come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation and defy the antichrist. They were mentioned in chapter 13 as those who "...refused to worship the image...", and as those who would go into captivity or be killed by the sword for not worshiping the beast. (Revelation 13:10 and 15). They were also mentioned by Jesus as those who, "...had not received its [antichrist's] mark on their foreheads or their hands." (Revelation 19:4). The reason they are seen in heaven at this point is probably because they will have been killed for accepting Christ and for refusing to worship the antichrist:

- They will be the ones Jesus talked about in the Olivet Discourse who will be, "...handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." (Matthew 24:9)
- They are the ones, "...to be killed..." for refusing to worship the beast. (Revelation 13:15).
- And those who, "...could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast...", - because they refused to take its mark (Revelation 13:17).

- They will be those who will stain wicked Babylon, the antichrist's harlot empire, "... with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore the testimony of Jesus."
- (Revelation 17:6).
- And it is these whom Jesus calls, "...the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God." (Revelation 20:4).

In many ways these will be some of the most faithful Christians who will ever live. They obviously rejected Jesus prior to the Tribulation because they missed the Rapture, but during the Tribulation they will come to recognize their mistake and accept Christ as their Savior. Yet they will do this at a time when acceptance of Jesus and rejection of the antichrist will mean almost certain persecution and death. They will be social outcasts, hated by everyone, hunted by all and unable to earn a living or buy the necessities of life. They will not be able to blend-in or escape recognition because they will not have the required mark of the beast on their forehead or hands. That alone will make them stand-out from the crowd. They will be fugitives in an incredibly sinful world yet they will carry the testimony of Jesus and of His word in the most hostile environment. And their testimony will be powerful. So much so, that in addition to the 144,000, the Two Witnesses and the Proclaiming Angel, I believe these fugitive believers will be some of the Tribulation periods greatest witnesses. Possibly, the greatest witnesses of all times. Why? Because Jesus said they will be killed, "...because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God." (Revelation 20:4). They will testify to the truth of the gospel during the most sinful and chaotic period in the history of man. They will understand that a "testimony" is not something to be hidden in your heart. A testimony requires testifying; the bold act of proclaiming the truth of God's grace and Christ's redemptive sacrifice even though certain death is inevitable. I believe these new believers - often called "Tribulation Saints" - will be a powerful force and a major source of spreading the gospel message throughout the world. If they were a meek and insignificant group the antichrist would not have to persecute them or hunt them down to kill them, but given that he does, I believe they will be a powerful and engulfing wave of the faithful actively sharing the gospel until they are killed. When I think of them, I think of David's Mighty Men, --- "They were brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear. Their faces were the faces of lions and they were as swift as gazelles in the mountains." (1 Chronicles 12:8).

O, that we might have such faith and strength.

2.c. - "They held harps given them by God..."

There are several places in Revelation where we see reference to praises for God accompanied by harps. In chapter 5, we talked about the role of the harp throughout the Bible and focused on the song of the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Fours Elders before the throne of God as they sing praises to the Worthy Lamb with harp. (Revelation 5:8).

Let's look back to a portion of that lesson to jog our memories and help set the stage for chapter 15.

(Excerpt from Revelation 5:8c. - "Each one had a harp...")

- A harp is a stringed instrument and in ancient days was one of the most common ways of making music. The word harp and its derivatives are used 54 times in the Bible; generally, to describe an instrument for music that accompanies praise (Genesis 31:27 / Psalms 33:2 /

Psalms 71:22). But interestingly, there are several instances where the harp seems to be used in the act of prophesying.

- "David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals (1 Chronicles 25:1).
- "...Jeduthun, who prophesied, using the harp in thanking and praising the Lord."
- (1 Chronicles 25:3).
- "As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying." (1 Samuel 10:5).
- The term "prophesying" does not always mean to tell of future events -- although it can -- but it can also mean to proclaim or testify the truth of God's message. Given the situation they are in and the fact each of the Twenty-Four Elders have a harp may indicate they are proclaiming the truth of Jesus..."

Now in chapter 15 we see those who had been victorious over the antichrist gathered around the throne of God to sing praises to His name. They are each given a harp "...by God..." to accompany their song. As we will see, they actually sing two songs; the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

Verses 3 and 4 here serve as a summary of what the entire songs said:

3. "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. 4. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

The Song of Moses:

There are two songs in the Bible related to Moses; one in Deuteronomy and one in Exodus. In summary:

- Deuteronomy 32:

Just before Moses' death, God gave him a prophecy of Israel's future disobedience, "Then the Lord appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the cloud stood over the entrance to the tent. And the Lord said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them." (Deuteronomy 31:15-16). Afterwards Moses gathered the elders of the tribes and their officials so he could warn them of their impending failure and coming judgment. Once they had gathered, "...Moses recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel." The song is broken into several parts and in the modern Bible is further segregated into 43 verses. It praises God for His power and authority. It speaks of Israel as His people and extols His protection of them. Yet it points out Israel's failure to stay obedient and highlights the judgments brought-on by God when they were disobedient. It speaks also of judgment against the world and ends with the nations rejoicing at Israel's final restoration. Clearly the song summarizes the events of Israel up to and including her redemption during the time we now see in Revelation. At the end of the song Moses gave an impassioned plea to Israel. A call to obedience to God's word. A plea not applicable just to Israel, but a calling that should strike our hearts even today. - "Take heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command

your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you - they are your life." (Deuteronomy. 32:46-47).

- Exodus 15:

Although the song of Moses in Deuteronomy is powerful and speaks of Israel's eventual redemption, it is the song of Moses in Exodus 15 that speaks to my heart as the potential source of the song in Revelation chapter 15. The song of Moses in Exodus 15 is an amazingly powerful song of deliverance. It was sung by the Israelites to commemorate their rescue from Egypt and their journey to the promised land. The song exalts the Lord and His strength. It speaks of Him destroying their enemies. It expresses God's power and majesty. And then, at the end, it is prophetic and speaks of a time very similar to what we are seeing in Revelation, "You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance - the place, Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, Your hands established. The Lord reigns forever and ever." (Exodus 15:17-18). Although this speaks of Israel's deliverance to the promised land, it also speaks to the, "...mountain of your inheritance..." - "Then I looked and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion."

(Revelation 14:1 / Zechariah 14:4 / Job 19:25). It also speaks of God's dwelling and sanctuary, which could relate to the temple in which Jesus will reign during the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 19:4 and 6), and the eternal dwelling place of God where no temple is needed, "God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them."

(Revelation 21:3 and 22). On the song's closing comments, "...The Lord reigns forever and ever.", reminds me of David's forever throne, which prophecies of Christ's eternal reign, "He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."..."Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:13&16). This permanence was emphasized by Gabriel when he proclaimed to Mary that her Son would be the forever-Messiah, "The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:32-33 / Lamentations 5:19). It is this song in Exodus 15 that seems to more closely align with the summary in chapter 15, but both songs of Moses are powerful and uplifting.

The song of the Lamb:

This song speaks of a future time when all nations and people will bow before God. Jeremiah spoke of this when he said, "No one is like you, O Lord: you are great, and your name is mighty in power. Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you." (Jeremiah 10:6-7). But it also reveals that God's acts of judgment, being revealed through the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls, are righteous. As we have already discussed, God is all-mighty and all-righteous, and His actions, even those of such destruction, are holy. They are the vindication of a holy Father, who gave His only Son for the redemption of sinful man. But there will come a time when man will no longer seek grace. It is then that God's righteous indignation will fall on mankind through righteous judgment. --- The song of the Lamb may refer to the song in chapter 5, proclaiming the worthiness of Christ as the Holy Lamb of God. The only one worthy of bringing God's judgment upon His sinful creation. The song in chapter 5 was sung just before the first judgment Seals were broken in chapter 6. Then in chapter 11 we saw the same Twenty-Four Elders before the throne praising God in song for the judgment events that were about to

take place. They sang about the disobedient nations and the wrath that is to come. Now in chapter 15 we hear another song, but instead of being sung by the Twenty-Four Elders or the heavenly host, it is sung by those who have rejected the beast and became victors in Christ. They sing the song of Moses (Exodus 15) to commemorate their redemption and they sing the song of the Lamb, to extol His worthiness and righteous judgments (Revelation 5).

It is a victor's song. Songs sung by ancient Israelites, the Raptured church and now the victorious Tribulation Saints. It is also a song we can sing because we too, as believers in the Lamb of God, can praise the actions of God we know are coming.

LESSON 71

Revelation, chapter 15, Verses 5-8

Quick Recap of verses 1-4:

In verse 1 John again saw into heaven's inner-sanctum, but this time the crystal platform on which the throne of God sets reflected the fire of His coming judgment. John also saw a, "...marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues...". These "plagues" are the last of twenty-one righteous judgments of God. The final seven "Bowl" judgments that will pour holy wrath so horrific we can only begin to imagine how destructive they will be.

But then John saw a wonderful sight. Standing near the throne of God were those amazing believers who had come to Christ during the Tribulation period and had refused to worship the antichrist. They will stand before God and sing praises for their rescue and redemption. They will sing the "...song of Moses...", probably indicating the song commemorating Israel's release from Egypt in Exodus chapter 15, and the "...song of the Lamb...". Most likely the praise sung to Jesus in Revelation chapter 5. They will praise God because, "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." --- Amen.

Now, with that context let's complete chapter 15.

5. After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple -- that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law -- and it was opened. 6. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. 7. Then one of the Four Living Creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. 8. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."

5. "After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple -- that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law -- and it was opened."

5.a. - "After this I looked, and I saw..."

As we've seen several times in Revelation John indicates this is more than just a mental vision. Here he tells us "...I looked...", which is a specific action using his eyes. To me, this is more than if he had said "I imagined". In this case John intentionally "...looked..." and "...saw...". This brings depth to the view God has given John and helps us understand it is an authentic view into future events.

5.b. - "...in heaven the temple -- that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law..."

In chapter 11 John was given an earlier view of God's heavenly temple, "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within the temple was seen the ark of the covenant..."

(Revelation 11:19 / 3:12 / 7:15). But here John further defines what he sees as the "...tabernacle of the covenant law...". So, let's break that down a bit: During Israel's wanderings in the wilderness Moses erected a tent, a meeting place, to speak with God and to house the holy ordinances, including the ark of the covenant, "Then the Lord said to Moses: "Set up the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting on the first day of the first month. Place the ark of the Testimony in it and shield the ark with the curtain." (Exodus 40:1-3). But this was much more than a tent where Moses would meet with God (Exodus 33:7-11). The Tabernacle was a "...dwelling place...", where God would dwell amongst His people, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." This was the Tabernacle. The forerunner of the Temple in later times. God gave Moses detailed instructions for the construction and furnishings of the Tabernacle through a vision or a view into heaven of what the Tabernacle should look like. (Exodus chapters 25-27 / 35-40). In doing so He instructed Moses to, "Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you." ...and..., "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Exodus 25:9 / 25:40 / 27:8). The phrase, "On the mountain...", would indicate Mount Sinai where Moses met with God (Exodus 19), received the Ten Commandments (the Covenant Law) (Exodus 20), was given additional commands (Exodus 21-24), and was provided specific instructions about how to build and furnish the Tabernacle. (Exodus 25-30). This was confirmed by the writer of Hebrews who cited, "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:5). God gave Moses the instructions. Then He gifted specific men with the skills to build the Tabernacle and to craft each item of observance (Exodus 35:30).

It was in the Tabernacle that God would house the ark of the covenant, which in itself is a kind of "tabernacle". The ark held the two stone tablets of the covenant law, a jar of manna and the budding staff of Aaron. (Exodus 25:16 / Exodus 40:20 / Exodus 16:32 / Numbers 17:2-10). It was also in the Tabernacle where there was an inner-room called the "Holy of Holies" - or "Most Holy Place", which was restricted to only the high priest, and then only once a year to enter and make atonement for the people. (Exodus 16). To create the Most Holy Place God instructed Moses to make a special curtain that, "...will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Put the atonement cover on the ark of testimony in the Most Holy Place." (Exodus 26:33-34). The curtain symbolized (and physically restricted) the separation of a Holy God from sinful man. The high priest was only able to come into God's presence in the Most Holy Place on a certain day and with specific regulations.

5.c. - "...and it was opened."

But that changed with the crucifixion of Jesus (Hebrews 4:14-5:1-6). As our own High Priest Jesus offers us a new covenant. Not one based on the Law or holy ordinances, but one based on the holy sacrifice of the Holy Lamb for the atonement of our sins. It is He who, "... sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true Tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man." (Hebrews 8:1-2). This is why at the crucifixion, "...darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:44-46 / Matthew 27:50 / Mark 15:37). At that moment, the curtain separating the covenant of God and sinful man was removed. No longer did a human high priest have to enter the Most High Place to offer atonement for sin. Instead, Jesus became the holy sacrifice for man, so that the covenant law was fulfilled by the new covenant in blood. "But when

Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once and for all by His own blood, this obtaining eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:11-12). As a result, "...we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and we have a great priest over the house of God." (Hebrews 10:20-22). With Christ the veil is torn and the barrier removed that separates us from God. Because, through our salvation, "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance..." (Hebrews 9:15). And as such the curtain is no longer closed - "...it was opened." For us! --- Hallelujah!

But looking ahead, we see a time when there will be no temple. Near the end of Revelation, John saw a vision of the New Heaven, the New Earth and the New Jerusalem, but something will be missing, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." (Revelation 21:22). At that future time when we will be living for eternity with God there will be no need of a sanctuary. That's because, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever."

(Revelation 22:3-5). ---- Hallelujah!

6. "Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests."

6.a. - "Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues...",
Coming out of the temple - the inner-sanctum of God - we see the last seven angels who will bring the last seven "...plagues...". As we've discussed, we learned the word "plague" is derived from the Greek word "plegas" which means great punishing blows and horrific terrible wounds. It is used here to describe the last seven of twenty-one judgment actions, and as we'll see in later chapters, the most horrific judgments of all.

6.b. - " They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests."
These are the first angels we've seen dressed this way. Probably indicating the importance of their role as God's final agents of judgment. The brilliant whiteness of their garments indicate righteousness and purity. Possibly to affirm God's judgments as just, righteous and holy.

We see a similar description in several places in the Bible. Here are a few:

- In his initial vision of the revealed Christ John saw, "...someone like the son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest." (Revelation 1:13). This is similar to the garment worn by the high priest in the temple (Exodus 39:28-29 / Leviticus 16:4), which may be a reflection of Jesus as our great High Priest. (Hebrews 4:13).
- It is similar to the vision Daniel had of a man who appears to be the pre-incarnate Christ, "...there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of fine gold..." (Daniel 10:5).
- To the church at Sardis Jesus promised, "Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white." (Revelation 3:4-5).

- This is similar to how John described the Twenty-Four Elders - arguably, the raptured church - "Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads." (Revelation 4:4).
- In chapter 6 we saw "...under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained." -- "Then each of them was given a white robe." (Revelation 6:9 / 11)
- Likewise, the "...great multitude that no one could count...", -- "...were wearing white robes...". (Revelation 7:9). "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14).
- It reminds us of the view of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, "...His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light..." (Matthew 17:2). Mark emphasized this further, "His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them." (Mark 9:3). This description reminds us of the psalmist's description of the Lord, "The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment." (Psalms 104:2).
- At the wedding supper of the Lamb, we see the bride -- the church -- described as "...his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people." (Revelation 19:7-8 / 2 Corinthians 11:1-2 / Ephesians 5:22-24 / Revelation 21:9)
- It is similar to the army of heaven returning with the victorious Warrior King Jesus, "The armies of heaven were following him, riding white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." (Revelation 19:14). Most conservative scholars believe this represents (at least in part) the raptured church.

7. "Then one of the Four Living Creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever."

7.a. - . "Then one of the Four Living Creatures..."

We first saw the Four Living Creatures in chapter 4, "In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and back." (Revelation 4:6). We have seen them in other places in Revelation, including:

- In chapter 6 one of the four living creatures announced the breaking of the first four Seals, "Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a white horse!" (Revelation 6:1-2). This Seal announced the revealing of the antichrist.
- This same announcement, "Come!" is repeated at the second Seal that brought war (Revelation 6:3), the third Seal that brought famine (Revelation 6:5) and the fourth Seal that brought death. (Revelation 6:7).
- Afterwards the Four Living Creatures took part in the praise before God when celebrating with the multitude before the throne. (Revelation 7:11-17).

Now in chapter 15 we see the Four Living Creatures in another judgment role. As they did in the initial Seal judgments, we now see them return to administer the final Bowl judgments.

7.b. - "...gave to the seven angels seven golden Bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever."

One of the Four Living Creatures gave each of the seven angels a Bowl. The fact the Bowl is "...golden..." may represent it holds God's holy and righteous wrath. These Bowls are the final

wrath of God and represent the judgments described in chapters 15 through 19. These are the judgment spoken of by Nahum when he said, "Who can withstand his indignation? Who can stand his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire;..." (Nahum 1:6). This verse also mentions the wrath comes from God "...who lives forever and ever." This emphasizes the eternal existence of God, which is affirmation of His total and divine authority.

8. "And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."

The smoke in the temple represents the glory of God. Not a thick, acrid smoke like wood burning, but more like the engulfing presence of a holy and righteous God. When Isaiah had a vision of God's throne room, "I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings..." -- "...and they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke." (Isaiah 6:1,2a,3,4). This reminds us of God's glory Moses saw on Mount Sinai when the mountain, "...was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it with fire." (Exodus 19:18), or when, "...the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Exodus 40:34).

Interestingly, "...no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." - God's temple was reserved for Him and Him alone until His final judgment actions are fulfilled. This reminds me of a similar occurrence when the construction of the original tent of meeting was complete, "Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Exodus 40:35). In Moses' case, the glory of the Lord in the Most Holy Place signified completion of the earthly temple for the people of God. Now, in chapter 15 it indicates completion of the final judgment actions which will destroy all sin and lead to God's renewed kingdom which will be reserved for the final people of God. (See Revelation 21:3-5). --- What a glorious day that will be.

LESSON 72

Revelation chapter 16, verses 1-4

Quick Recap:

Let's step back a bit to set the stage.

- In chapter 11 we saw an angel sound the seventh Trumpet, but rather than immediately seeing its destructive judgment we heard, "...loud voices in heaven...", saying praises to the Lord. That action signified the last of the seven Trumpet judgments but we would not see the outcome until now in chapter 16. After chapter 11 the Revelation narrative temporarily shifted our focus away from judgment actions to give us a more detailed view of things that had already occurred or were yet to come:
- Chapters 12-13 gave us details about satan, the antichrist, the false-prophet, and their efforts to establish a demonic world-wide empire.
- Chapter 14 gave us a preview of Christ's victorious Second-Coming, the ministry of His 144,000 witnesses, and then introduced us to three new angels:
 - The first proclaimed the gospel to the world,
 - The second announced the impending fall of the antichrist's empire,
 - And the third angel warned the followers of the beast that eternal doom would be their reward.
- Then at the end of chapter 14 we were given a glimpse of what will happen later in Revelation as Christ becomes the Holy Reaper of the final fallen world.
- Chapter 15 announces God's final seven judgment actions. These are shown as golden Bowls filled with God's wrath that will be poured on creation in rapid succession. We then saw the Tribulation Saints standing before the throne of God to glorify Him with the song of Moses (Exodus 15) and the song of the Lamb (Revelation 5). Songs that praise an almighty God for His mercy and redemptive grace.

Now chapter 16 picks up where chapter 11 left off. There we saw, "The seventh angel sounded his Trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven..." (Revelation 11:15). As we've discussed, this angel sounded his Trumpet but there was no sound and no immediate description of its judgment actions. But now in chapter 16 we will see the final outcome. Just as the seventh Seal initiated the first of seven Trumpet judgments (Revelation 8:1-2), now the seventh Trumpet judgment initiates the first of seven Bowl judgments. These are the last of God's twenty-one primary judgment actions - Seven Seals plus seven Trumpets plus seven Bowls.

The final Bowl judgments will occur at the very end of the seven year Tribulation period and just prior to Christ's return. They will probably occur over a very short period of time, one right after the other, as they build in their intensity with no relief. These are the final judgments of God. The judgments through which the world as we know it today, and the sinful people who will populate it at that time will be utterly destroyed.

And with that, the stage is set to see the outcome of God's final judgment actions starting in chapter 16, verses 1-4.

1. "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven Bowls of God's wrath on the earth." 2. The first angel went and poured out his Bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. 3. The second angel poured out his Bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died. 4. The third angel poured out his Bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood."

1. "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

Throughout our study we've discussed the "voice" or "voices" from heaven that announce judgments. On the surface it's unclear who the "...voice..." (singular) is. Possibly one of the Four Living Creatures who, "...gave to the seven angels seven golden Bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever." (Revelation 15:7). We know they are involved in giving out the Bowls and we know they also called-forth the first four Seal judgments with, "...a voice like thunder..." (Revelation 6:1). But possibly the singular voice of the Bowl's is the voice of God. We know from chapter 15:8 the temple is filled with the smoke of God's glory and power, but, "...no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." It appears the heavenly temple is empty with the exception of the Lord. He is there, but no one else, so the "...loud..." voice that comes from the temple may be the thundering voice of the Lord as He commands His final judgments, "Go, pour out the seven Bowls of God's wrath on the earth." This is the voice John heard in chapter 1 verse 10 when he said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice." - the voice of the Lord. The voice of whom Isaiah said, "Hear the uproar from the city, hear the noise from the temple! It is the sound of the Lord repaying His enemies all they deserve." (Isaiah 66:6).

2. "The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image."

These sores will not be inflicted on the Tribulation Saints who refused to worship the antichrist (Revelation 13:15 / 20:4), but will be reserved for those who took the mark of the beast. This judgment is different than most of the others. War, pestilence, poison water, bloody seas, cosmic disruptions and earthquakes -- are more global in nature and may impact different people in different ways. But this judgment is focused on each individual person and attacks everyone the same way. It brings ugly and active sores; festering and rotten on everyone who will have rejected Jesus. It reminds us of the plague upon Egypt, "So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on people and animals. The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians." (Exodus 9:10-11). These sores will bring unimaginable misery to those who follow the beast. They will have no rest, day and night, from the oozing and extremely painful sores that cover their entire bodies. In the "Curses for Disobedience" God warned the people, "The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured." - "The Lord will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head." (Deuteronomy. 28:27 and 35). This will be an affliction like has never occurred before. Every human on earth will be covered head to toe by extremely painful boils. There will be no vaccine and no medical procedure

that can take them away, and no relief from their suffering. Zechariah touches on this in his prophecy of the Lord's final judgments, "This is a plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths." (Zechariah 14:12). Theoretically Tribulation man could run from war, dodge a demon and maybe even hide from some of the other judgments, but none can run from this. It is personal and individual. It is a judgment from which there is no cure and no escape.

3. "The second angel poured out his Bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died".

In His precursor judgment on Egypt the Lord turned the Nile to blood, "The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt - over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs - and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone."..."The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water." (Exodus. 7:19 and 21).

Then in Revelation chapter 8 we saw an angel sound the second Trumpet and, "...something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed." (Revelation 8:8-9). Although this judgment will be horrific, in that it destroys a third of all the sea, it also shows God's continued grace because only a third of the sea and its inhabitants were affected. But now there is no mercy in the second Bowl. Instead, the entire sea is turned to blood, and not only blood, but "...blood like that of a dead person...". Rotten and coagulated blood like that in a dead body. Blackening and clotting with no oxygen and no life. Blood that turns on the body and instead of nourishing it, aids in the process of decaying it. This process will kill, "...every living thing in the sea...". From the largest whale to the smallest microorganism every form of sea-life will cease to exist. All of God's amazing and beautiful sea-creatures will be gone forever - never to return to an earth as we know it today. Instead of the colorful and vibrant sea-life there will be nothing but sea-death covering the surface and beaches with literally trillions of tons of rotting flesh. Just imagine the over-powering stench and disease that will come from a sea that is coagulated blood from surface to bottom. A sea littered with the corpses of uncountable sea life, when, "...every living thing..." is dead.

4. "The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood." At this point the entire ocean system will no longer exist but will be replaced by an ooze of thick and bloody slime. As bad as that will be, God's judgment then takes an even more deadly turn when He destroys all fresh drinking water. In chapter 8 God turned one-third of the rivers and streams to poison, "The third angel sounded his Trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water - the name of the star is Wormwood." (Revelation 8:10-11). But now God will bring the same judgment on the rivers that He did with the oceans -- they will be turned to blood. Every well, spring, mud-hole, creek and river; all sources of fresh water around the world, will ooze with the same coagulated mess as the oceans. What were once beautiful creations of God will now become unimaginable. Vast rivers, mountain streams and clear bubbling springs will all flow with rotting blood. To give us a mental picture of what Tribulation man will see just try to imagine what Niagara Falls will look like.

But much more important than how the waters look or smell's, is its absence. From this point forward there will be no drinking water on the entire earth. No water to quench the thirst of mankind as he reels from war, pestilence, cosmic disturbances and all of the other judgments. No water to sustain wildlife, no water to wash their boil-ridden bodies, no water to cool the world's business, or machinery or military. Man's bodies, that are 60% water, with brains that are 73% water and lungs that are 83%, will suffer severe dehydration and its resulting body damage and sickness. Overnight water will become the most valuable and scarcest natural resource on earth. There will be no water anywhere, of any kind, and the world will quickly become a dry and cracked dust bowl of death.

LESSON 73

Revelation chapter 16, verses 5-7

Quick Recap:

In our prior lesson we discussed the first three Bowl judgments. These will be part of the final seven of twenty-one destructive punishments God will inflict on mankind who live in the post-rapture Tribulation period. The first seven Seal judgments will bring the antichrist, war, pestilence, famine and cosmic destructions. This will be followed by seven Trumpet judgments that will blast increasingly more severe punishments on man and on creation. Now, in chapter 16 we see the final seven Bowl judgments - the most destructive judgments of all.

As we discussed:

- The first Bowl will bring painful boils and festering sores upon every person on earth who worships the beast and takes his mark. Unlike earlier judgments that are more global in nature, this judgment will attack every individual on earth with suffering they cannot escape and we cannot imagine.
- The second Bowl will turn the oceans of the world into a thick and rotting sea of blood. This will make the oceans a cesspool of trillions of rotting carcasses when all of sea life dies.
- The third Bowl will do the same and turn every freshwater spring, pond, lake, stream and river into coagulated blood. At this point there will be no fresh water on the entire earth to nourish the land or hydrate and cleanse mankind.

And with that context let's continue chapter 16 with verses 5 through 7.

5. "Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve. 7. And I heard the altar respond, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

Verses 5 through 7 they are basically one streaming thought, but we'll break them out so we can discuss specific parts in more detail. It's important to note that after the description of His first three horrific Bowl judgments God gives the reader a reprieve. Much like we saw in chapter 7 (verses 10-17), chapter 11 (verses 15-18), chapter 12 (verses 10-12) and chapter 15 (verses 3-4), there is a short break in the judgment actions to bring praises to God. The intent of this praise is primarily to remind the reader that in the midst of God's most severe judgments we must understand that his actions are holy and righteous. But the short recess also gives the reader a pause to be encouraged. In one sense, reading the descriptions of God's judgment actions against man should break our hearts. Mankind has been given grace over grace for thousands of years, yet even when the most severe punishments of God are pounding upon them most people will still not accept His offered redemption. Prior to the Tribulation many of the people punished by these judgments might have been really "good" people; honest people, helpful and trustworthy people, but tragically they did not know Christ as their Savior. Depending on the time of the Rapture these might even be people we know and love. Co-workers, friends and family members we could not, or did not, lead to the Lord. What a tragic ending that will be. Then on top of the human aspect is the impact to our world. The beautiful earth, with its majestic mountains, sweeping plains and

mighty oceans will be burned, scared, war-torn, blood-soaked and destroyed. In this sense, the judgments on man and the universe are a sad commentary on the condition of man and the power of sin. --- That's why verses 5-7 not only justify the judgment actions of a holy God, but they give us a short break in the heart-wrenching narrative for a moment of encouragement and grace.

5. "Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were;..."

5.a. - "Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments..."

As the Bowl judgments are poured out on man, the angel "...in charge of the waters...", declares the righteousness of God's actions. He reminds us these actions are "...just...". In other words, God's actions are warranted and we should view them as legitimate and righteous acts of a holy God against the remnant of mankind's most unholy seed. As Moses reminds us, God, "...is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he." (Deuteronomy 32:4). This is echoed by the Psalmist who says, "The works of his hands are faithful and just..." (Psalms 111:7). This truth is further clarified by the apostle Paul who described God's just nature to the church at Thessalonica and did so in the context of the Tribulation period, "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on that day he comes to be glorified..." (2 Thessalonians 1:5-9).

5.b. - "...O Holy One..."

So why are God's actions justified? Because He is holy and as a holy God He makes no mistakes nor does He do anything wrong. Through the millennia of time God has given man every opportunity to be rewarded for obedience. In the beginning, man was made perfect and placed in a perfect world where he lived in perfect unity with God. But man failed and sinned against God, yet the Lord in His infinite mercy showed man a balanced view of grace for redemption and the curse of death for disobedience. Even so, man has continued to sin, and despite all of those sins God has consistently applied both grace and wrath. Even to the point of sending Himself, in the person of Jesus, to bring His message of redemption by illustrating His willingness to accept his own wrath on Calvary that was meant for us. Yet man continues to reject God's offer of grace even though He has been very clear about the consequences of rejecting His wonderful gift.

But near the end of the Tribulation, the spirit of man will no longer accept God's offer of redemption. They will come face to face with their reality and "...cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, but they will not repent of what they have done." (Revelation 16:11). As a result, these judgment, as relentless and horrific as they may be, are justified. To the point that God has reserved an entire book in the Bible just to warn man again of exactly what will happen if he does not repent. Not only are God's actions just, they should come as no surprise. For thousands of years, God has offered mankind His mercy and grace with the reward of forgiveness of sin and eternal redemption. But over the centuries, man has resisted God's offer of mercy which in-turn brings about wrath. Throughout the Biblical timeline God's message is periodically punctuated by punishment and wrath to give man warning after warning of what will occur if he continues to be disobedient. But for the most part mankind has continued

to rebel, and as the centuries have passed, man's disobedience has become his very nature. Even after God came to earth as man to give Himself in payment for man's iniquity, man continued to reject His gift of eternal life.

Now in Revelation we see the end. The time of man's greatest tribulation in history. A time when God will continue to offer grace over grace as He seeks to give unrepentant man one more chance to turn to Jesus. But the time will come when man will no longer turn to God for salvation. Instead, they will defy God even though they know who He is, and they will refuse to repent of their sin even though He offers a means of rescue. (Revelation 16:9-11). This is the point we see now in chapter 16. A point of no return. The time when all mercy and grace are reeled back in and the horrific power of God's holy and righteous judgment is at hand. --- It will be as the prophet Isaiah said, "See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with the fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment on all people and many will be those slain by the Lord." (Isaiah 66:15-16)

5.c. - "...you who are and who were..."

The angel reminds us that God is eternal; never ending nor beginning. It is God, "...who is, and who was, and who is to come..." (Revelation 1:4 / 1:8). He is, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (Revelation 4:8 / 11:17). It is His holiness that makes God's actions just. He has been "...patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish...", (2 Peter 3:9), but at this point in the Tribulation His patience is exhausted and His final and righteous wrath will come at last.

6. "...for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

6.a. - "...for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets,..."

In his discourse on the seven woes Jesus said, "Woe, to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets. So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Go ahead then, and complete what your ancestors started! You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?' Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify, others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town." (Matthew 23:29-35).

Arguably Abel was the first prophet for it was Abel who recognized that man comes to God through faith and repentance, "And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead." (Hebrews 11:4). What the writer of Hebrews means is that Abel's story - the story of repentance before God - is the roots of the gospel still spoken of today. A story that begins the prophetic narrative of salvation through faith, not works. Then at the end of the prophet lineage was John the Baptist. He transitioned from the earlier prophecies of a coming Messiah to the announcement that the Lamb of God had finally come. (Matthew 3:1-3). Between these two men God sent many prophets as messengers and through them wove the fabric of His gospel through God's grace and man's redemption. But often the message of the prophets was ignored. Primarily because the prophets brought a message that required a recognition of and confession of sin. The prophets also

brought a message of impending doom if man failed to repent and turn to God. This did not sit well with man because they did not want to stop sinning. Instead, they often punished or killed the prophets of God and rejected their message:

- "...Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord..." (1 Kings 18:4).
- "...the sons of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword..." (1 Kings 19:14).
- "They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you..." (Nehemiah 9:26).
- "Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah - how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me.'" (Romans 11:3 / 1 Kings 19:10).
- "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown." (Luke 4:24).

6.b. - "...and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

By this point in the Tribulation the only liquid available to drink is blood. The rotted and coagulated blood of the second and third Bowl judgments. Man will be crazy with thirst, parched and dry from the destruction and sickness they will have to endure, but on the entire earth there will not be a single cup of clean water to drink. This punishment is deserved and just. A fitting end for the remnant of mankind left on earth who will worship the antichrist.

7. And I heard the altar respond" "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

We studied the altars in heaven in Revelation 8:3. Now in chapter 16 John "...heard..." the altar respond. Possibly, this is the voice of God from His throne-room where the altar is located? Or maybe it is the personified voice of the altar that is enabled to speak? Or, maybe it is the voices of those "...under the altar..."? The slain who were martyred for their faith in God and who cried out for His vengeance. (Revelation 6:9-11). Whatever the source, the altar joins in the chorus of those proclaiming the righteous and just actions of God. It is a song of justification. As the Psalmist declared, "...so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge." (Psalms 51:4). A justification emphasized by Paul, "Let God be true, and every human a liar. As it is written, "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge." (Romans 3:4).

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to God for true and just are his judgments." (Revelation 19:1).

LESSON 74

Revelation, chapter 16 verses 8-9

Quick Recap:

As we have seen, chapter 16 reveals God's final Tribulation judgment actions. Initiated by seven Seal judgments and followed by seven Trumpet judgments, we now see the final seven Bowl judgments. As severe as the first fourteen judgments will be, the Bowl judgments are exponentially more destructive and will result in the end of mankind and the world as we know it today.

Earlier in this chapter we saw the first Bowl judgment which will inflict every follower of the antichrist with incurable boils and sores. The second Bowl will turn the world's oceans into a rotting cauldron of blood. The third Bowl will do the same to all fresh water on earth. By this point in the Tribulation the world will be in total chaos with all of creation having been destroyed or altered in some way. Then with the Bowl judgments mankind will be personally afflicted with sores and severe dehydration. It would seem that things could not get any worse, but as we will see, in the final four Bowls, God's judgments rapidly become cataclysmic in every way.

With that background let's look at the fourth Bowl.

8. "The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. 9. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him."

8. "The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire."

The hottest place on earth is Death Valley California. Setting at 282 feet below sea level in the Mojave Desert, it is potentially the lowest and hottest location on earth. So hot, that at 3:41PM on August 17th, 2020, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reported the temperature at Death Valley's Furnace Creek to be 130 degrees Fahrenheit. Once that reading is validated it will be the highest recorded temperature on the face of the earth. Temperature readings of 129 degrees have been recorded in Kuwait and Pakistan, so clearly Death Valley is not the only land-furnace on earth. In fact, other readings as high as 136.4 degrees have been recorded in the Libyan desert, but the one from Death Valley used the most reliable equipment and is considered the most accurate.

I provide this background to simply help us put the fourth Bowl judgment in perspective.

8.a. - "The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun...,"

With this Bowl we see a shift in perspective. The first Bowl was poured out on the land, the second Bowl on the sea and the third on the rivers and springs of water. Each of the three were in some way poured out on the earth. But now the fourth Bowl is poured out on the sun, and with this God will take the Bowl judgments to space and our atmosphere -- literally to the air. The place Paul calls the realm of satan, "...the ruler of the kingdom of the air..." (Ephesians 2:2). This may be a way of indicating satan will have nowhere to run. He was cast out of heaven by the archangel

Michael (Revelation 12:9), then the entire earth was pounded with severe judgment and destruction, and now God has poured His holy wrath on the sun.

The sun is of course a creation of God, "...and let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth". And it was so. God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night." (Genesis 1:14-16). Throughout time the sun became a prominent player in God's plan. When Joshua and the army of Israel fought against the five kings of the Amorites, Hebron, Jarmuth, Laclish and Eglon, the Lord made the sun stand still until the army of Israel could be victorious. (Joshua 10:8-14). The Psalmist also reminds us, "...the sun governs the day, His love endures forever..." (Psalms 136:8). And in Revelation John compares the face of Jesus to, "...the sun shining in all its brilliance." (Revelation 1:16). The sun provides warmth to an earth that would otherwise freeze in the extreme cold of space. It governs the seasons, nourishes the world's plant-life, and aids in the evaporation of water to bring much-needed rain. The sun is also part of God's perfect design to keep its extreme heat from destroying the earth. Our atmosphere, a multi-layered system of particles and water vapor shields the earth's surface from the sun's heat and radiation. This is a critical balance imposed by God, because it is estimated the surface of the sun is over 27 million degrees. Without the earth's atmosphere there would be no protection from deadly solar radiation, rivers and oceans would boil because the pressure in the water would be greater than that in the air, the oxygen we breath would be turned to carbon dioxide and plants, animals and fish would die. Although the Bible doesn't say this, it stands to reason that temperatures of this magnitude would alter the earth's ice fields which would be catastrophic. In fact, the US Geological Survey estimates that if the polar ice caps and glaciers melted the world's oceans (which by this point would be rotten blood) would "...rise approximately 230 feet, flooding every coastal city on the planet." This in itself would drown hundred-of-millions of people, but scientists also believe this influx of melt-water (actually melt-blood) would upset the earth's rotation and may cause it to shift on its axis. This could cause cataclysmic changes to our entire ecosystem. Changes, that would already be well known by God. The prophet Amos spoke of a similar event when he said, "The Lord, the Lord Almighty, he who touches the earth and it melts, and all who live in it mourn - the whole land rises like the Nile, then sinks like the river of Egypt..." (Amos 9:5) The Psalmist also speaks of this power when he declares, "Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts." (Psalms 46:6).

Granted, the natural events discussed above is a scientific view of the potential results of a shift in the sun's posture, and are not defined in the Bible, but it is reasonable to assume that a dramatic shift in the sun's role would result in a chain reaction of events. But whether or not these and other natural activities occur at the end of the Tribulation, it is clear the sun will no longer play the role it does today. Instead, it will become the source of extreme punishment on the earth and those in sin who dwell upon it.

8.b. - "...and the sun was given power..."

In addition to the natural events that will occur, the real focus on God's judgment is on man. Here the Bible speaks of the sun as being "...given power...". I don't believe that means the Lord will animate the sun and give it the ability to exercise its own power. I believe this indicates God will change the boundaries of physics within which the sun operates so that its power will now be used at God's discretion to bring judgment.

8.c. + 9.a. - "...to scorch people with fire. 9. They were seared by the intense heat..."

And what an intense judgment that will be. Picture for a moment a world populated by the antichrist's followers. By then the earth has been under multiple destructive forces for almost seven years. Wars, disease, demons and cosmic disturbances have pounded the earth. Man himself will be covered with excruciatingly painful boils from head to foot and there will be no water of any kind on the whole earth to drink. Then God will use the sun to raise the temperature to an extreme. The Bible doesn't say how hot, but it will certainly be higher than anything on earth today. Heat high enough to "...sear...", and to "...scorch people with fire...". Not just heat, but with fire. It will literally cook them alive. This is reminiscent of the curses God promised to His disobedient children, "The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron." (Deuteronomy 28:22-23). Likewise, Peter, in his prophecy of the end of days declares, "By the same word the present heavens and the earth are preserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." (2 Peter 3:7).

9.b. - "...and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him."

In chapter 6 we saw a similar reaction. Mankind was in the early stages of the Tribulation and had gone through the first six Seal judgments. It would seem logical (which man often fails to be) that mankind would seek relief from the suffering and destruction. But even by that point they will be so loyal to their sin and satan's influence that. "...the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called for the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 6:15-16). It's not like these are pagan cultures who have no idea what is happening. This passage tells us it is everyone, from the most powerful king to the lowliest slave, and they know who is bringing judgment and who is the source of their suffering. It is God the Father, on the throne, and the ultimate activator of wrath - the Holy Lamb. Yet even with this knowledge they reject redemption and salvation from the almighty God and instead pray to the earth to kill them. Now in chapter 16, near the end of the Tribulation period, at a time when God's judgment actions are unimaginable, man does not turn to God. Even though they know "...who had control over these plagues...", they curse His name, refuse to repent of their sin and will not give Him glory.

We cannot even imagine how sinful and depraved mankind will be when they get to this point.

LESSON 75

Revelation chapter 16 verses 10-11

Quick Recap:

As we've now seen, chapter 16 describes the most severe judgment actions of God -- the Bowls. These final seven judgments will follow seven Trumpet judgments which will be preceded by seven Seal judgments. Combined, these make-up the twenty-one total judgments God will inflict on creation during the Tribulation period. Of the twenty-one judgments, the Bowls are by far the most destructive, pouring extreme wrath on all remaining creation. But even with this unbelievable level of destruction we must remember that God's wrath is righteous and justified. That's because during this future period of time the sin of man will be so wicked, and the disobedience of man so absolute, they will fail to turn to God even when eternal death is their only other option.

The first Bowl will bring incurable boils and sores on every follower of the antichrist. The second and third Bowls will then turn all of the earth's water to blood, immediately resulting in extreme dehydration of the land and all living creatures. Right after that comes the fourth Bowl when God will use the sun to bring intense super-heat upon the earth and man. Searing and burning, it will literally cook them alive.

Now, with the fifth Bowl God turns His wrath towards the antichrist, his empire and everything he stands for. ---- At that point, the victory of Christ will be close at hand.

And with that background let's study the fifth Bowl.

10. "The fifth angel poured out his Bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony 11. and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done."

10. "The fifth angel poured out his Bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony..."

10.a. - "The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast..."

The fifth angel does not direct his Bowl at the land, the sky, or the people. Instead, he pours God's wrath directly on the throne of the antichrist.

The Greek term for "throne", "thronon", can have two meanings:

- In one sense it could be speaking of a literal throne; the seat the antichrist will sit on and govern from. A Biblical example of this use of the word could be, "...so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:30). You'll also recall from our study of the seven churches of Revelation, Jesus criticized the church at Pergamum for their regions pagan worship, "I know where you live - where satan has his throne." (Revelation 2:13). This was probably speaking of the throne-shaped altar to zeus that was in Pergamum. The same Greek word was used here.

- But another, and more likely use of the term, speaks to the function of the throne as the symbol of political power. In comparison, the King James version uses the term "...upon the seat...", which in the NIV is translated to "...on the throne...". Both of these speak to the throne's influence rather than the function. In times past the term "throne" was used to define the seat of power and position of a ruler. For example, the statement, "The prince is next in line to inherit the throne." (Webster's example), that doesn't mean the prince is going to inherit a specific chair, but indicates he is going to inherit the rights and power of the monarchy the chair represents. Given additional context we'll see later in chapter 17 this is probably the meaning of "thronon" here in verse 10. A Biblical example of this usage would be, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool..." (Acts 7:49 / Isaiah 66:1). In this case neither heaven nor the footstool is a literal chair, but it represents God's unlimited seat of power.

Now in verse 10 we see the angel pouring God's wrath on the antichrist's "throne". His seat of power. This represents his government, rule, authority and sphere of influence, and indicates the wrath is not being poured out on the throne itself, but on the ruler and the very fabric of his kingdom's infrastructure. By this point in the Tribulation the antichrist will be in full demonic power. His "throne" will be a single demonically inspired dictatorial government that rules over politics, finances, the military and religion. This is the seat of power and influence God will now destroy.

10.b. - "...and his kingdom was plunged into darkness..."

Similar to the word "throne", the term "...darkness..." can also be viewed in two ways -- physical and mental. The Greek term used here, "Eskotomene", can mean to "cover with darkness", but it can also mean "moral and spiritual darkness, obscurity and blindness". So, I think in this verse the term could mean both; a physical darkness or moral and spiritual confusion. Either of which could be used as a judgment action.

For example, the same Greek word in other verses:

- In speaking of Jerusalem and Israel just prior to the Millennial Kingdom, Isaiah prophesied, "Arise, shine for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." (Isaiah 60:1-3) ---- This could reflect both a physical darkness, "...covers the earth...", but also could mean a spiritual darkness because the people "...will come to your light...", meaning they are drawn spiritually to Jerusalem and Israel.
- In reference to the Day of the Lord (typified by the final seven Bowl judgments), the prophet Joel proclaimed, "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness." (Joel 2:2) --- This could of course speak to a physical judgment, "...darkness, clouds and blackness...", but "...gloom..." could also speak of an emotion response.
- In the Olivet Discourse Jesus spoke about this event when He said, "But in those days, following that distress, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'" Here He was speaking of the prophecy He had given Joel, "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Joel 2:31) -- This speaks primarily of the physical aspects of the darkness, but we can also see emotion in the term "...dreadful...".

- When God brought punishment upon ancient Egypt He used darkness as a judgment tool, "So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about for three days." (Exodus 10:23). Obviously, all of Egypt was covered in darkness, but there would also be the stress that would come from not being able to see anyone or even move.
- At the point Jesus died on the cross, "...darkness covered the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining..." (Luke 23:44) --- Clearly, this was a physical event and a precedent to the Tribulation when God will blot out the sun again.

The purpose of providing these prophetic examples using the same word gives us a scriptural basis for its meanings. I believe the use of the word in verse 10, "...and his kingdom was plunged into darkness...", could also mean both. Like Egypt, the antichrist's empire will be plunged into physical darkness. That would include the location of his seat of power and spreading across the entire world. Given all of the other judgments that will be pounded on man at that time, the total absence of light will undoubtedly send the world into a frenzied pandemonium of fear and dread. There is no telling what wicked man will do under these conditions, but one thing is certain. They will not turn to God for redemption.

10.c. - "Men gnawed their tongues in agony 11. and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done."

We discussed this same response in verse 9, "...and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him." It seems amazing to us that man would be so wicked they would refuse to worship God even though it should be clear by that point the antichrist cannot help them. But you'll recall from Paul's explanation to the church at Thessalonica, "They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but delighted in wickedness." (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). The author of Proverbs also speaks of man being so wicked he drifts into unreconcilable darkness, "But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble." (Proverbs 4:19). Man at this point will be so wicked they will stumble into darkness and not even know why. Their physical pain will be so great they will chew on the tongues to distract them from their pain, but their spiritual minds will be so wicked it will be impossible for them to push away from their sins so they can turn to God.

It will be as it was in the days of Noah, when, "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time."..."So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created..." (Genesis 6:5&7).

When this happens again during the Tribulation, man's total rejection of Jesus will be complete and their hope of redemption will be gone.

LESSON 76

Revelation chapter 16, verses 12-15

Quick Recap:

By this point in the Tribulation the world's population will be in complete turmoil. God's judgment actions will be severe beyond belief and undiluted by grace. Through a series of twenty-one Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments He will have brought war, pestilence, death and suffering across the world. Objects from space will crash into the earth, great earthquakes will occur, oceans and rivers will be turned to blood and nature will be burned to a crisp. Millions of demons will run rampant over the earth to torment man and every follower of the antichrist will be covered with incurable and excruciatingly painful sores. Then God will bake the earth and its people with extreme heat and fire from the sun and the earth will go completely dark -- both physically and spiritually -- as a pitch-black void of sight and thought engulfs the whole world and grips its people in abject fear. And most disturbing is the fact that through all of this the world will be under the influence of a single demonically controlled and vicious dictator - the antichrist - who through his evil compatriot - the false-prophet - will cause the people of the world to worship satan in a religious frenzy of sin and self-destruction.

Now with the sixth Bowl we'll see the next to last of the twenty-one Tribulation judgments. As the armies of the world come together to form the largest and most sinful confederation of nations in history, Christ will be prepared and ready to return to destroy His foe and reclaim His rightful possession.

And with that context, let's breakdown verses 12-15, the sixth Bowl judgment.

12. "The sixth angel poured out his Bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 13. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false-prophet. 14. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out after the kings of the whole world, to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty. 15. "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

12. "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east."

12.a. - "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates...",
In chapter 9 we discussed the River Euphrates as it relates to the sixth Trumpet. Now in chapter 16 we see how the river relates to the sixth Bowl. Given the importance of the Euphrates in the Revelation narrative, let's go back to a portion of our earlier lesson and refresh our memories.

In chapter 9 verses 13-16 we read: - "The sixth angel sounded his Trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. 14. It said to the sixth angel who had a Trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' 15. And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year

were released to kill a third of mankind. 16. The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand." -- This is the future time when God will release four fallen angels who are held captive at the river Euphrates for this very purpose. He will release them at the sixth Trumpet to lead an army of 200 million demons against mankind.

But why does the river Euphrates play such an important role in Revelation? Let's look back to our lesson from chapter 9 to see:

- At 1,700 miles in length, the Euphrates is the longest river in Western Asia. Its source is in the mountains of Turkey from where it travels through modern day Syria and Iraq to empty in the Persian Gulf. Along with the Tigris, the two rivers bounded the land of Mesopotamia - "The Land Between the Rivers."
- It was one of four rivers - Euphrates, Tigris, Pishon and Gihon (the Pishon and Gihon are now gone) - that ran through the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:10-14). As such, it was part of the perfect land where Adam and Eve lived.
- It was this region in Ur, from which God called Abram to a land in Canaan.
- It was (is) the north-eastern boundary of The Promised Land given to Abraham, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates." (Genesis 15:18). This was a covenant promise between God and Abraham, and as such, it remains to this day the boundary of the promised land God gave to Israel.
- It is listed as a region of king David's great victories against Israel's enemies. (2 Samuel 8:3-4)
- But, through man's fall it became the epicenter of sinful activity on earth.
- It was in this area where satan first tempted man to sin. (Genesis 3).
- It was here the first murder was committed and man chose between two spiritual routes - the obedient way of Abel-Seth and the disobedient way of Cain. (Genesis 4).
- It was here man turned against God and tried to make a tower at Babel so they could "...make a name for themselves...", rather than bowing before His holy Name. As a result, God scattered mankind - and their sin - across the world. (Genesis 11).
- The area became the homeland of Israel's greatest enemies - amongst these, the Assyrians, Medo-Persians and Babylonians. Conflicts that still exist to this day. (Ezra 4:9-10).
- It was the land to which Israel was exiled by the Assyrians (ca 720 BC) and by the Babylonians (ca 605 to 586 BC). The time and place in which Daniel was given the end-times vision of the seventieth week. (Daniel 9:27).
- It is the place from which God will release the four fallen-angels who will command a massive demon army. (Revelation 9).
- It is here, God will dry up the river so the massive armies of man can gather "...for the battle on the great day of God Almighty..." "...to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (Revelation 16:14 and 16).
- It is the place from which the antichrist's evil empire gets its name "Mystery Babylon the Great The Mother of Prostitutes." (Revelation 17:5).

Obviously, the river Euphrates is important to God and has been associated with man's creation, man's fall, man's disobedience and now man's total destruction.

12.b. - "...and its water was dried up..."

On two other occasions God stopped the waters of a great river to enable His plans to proceed:

- During Israel's escape from Egypt God parted the Red Sea so that, "...the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground..." (Exodus 14:22). After Israel crossed to the eastern shore Pharaoh's army entered the open sea corridor in pursuit. But God sent judgment on Egypt, collapsed the walls of water and, "The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen - the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived." (Exodus 14:31).
- Years later when Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land they had to cross the Jordan River. There, God, "...piled up [the water] in a heap a great distance away...", and "...all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground." (Joshua 3:16-17).
- The prophet Isaiah speaks of both of these events. He reminds us of God's parting of the Red Sea and he prophesied the future drying-up of the Euphrates, "The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals." (Isaiah 11:15). God parted the Red Sea and the Jordan River to allow access for His people. During the Tribulation He will dry-up the great river Euphrates to allow access to His enemies -- access to the land of Israel. Yet as we will see, what may seem to be an advantage for God's enemies, is actually a road to their destruction.

12.c. - "...to prepare the way for the kings from the east."

What an interesting comment, "...to prepare the way...". Here God is preparing a route to aid the movement of His enemy's armies to come against Israel. But what appears to be God helping, is in fact God baiting a very dangerous trap.

So who are the, "...kings from the east...", and why is God preparing a way for them? The Bible isn't clear who these kings are or exactly where they are from, but given the description and based on today's global demographics it may include the leaders and their armies from the "Far Eastern" nations of China, Japan, Korea, India, South East Asia, and other countries in the "Middle Eastern" nations of Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and other Middle Eastern countries. Today, many of these nations practice religious systems that are based on idol worship. In the broadest sense all idol worship is demonic because it defies man's decree to worship God alone, and unabated it results in a spiritually depraved mind. (Exodus 20:3-4 / Romans 1:18-32). These belief systems will make it much easier for the false-prophet to influence the world to worship the antichrist because it will be based on idolatry as well. (Revelation 13:14).

But given the fact we don't know when the Tribulation will occur, we actually don't know for sure who will come from the east. If it happens in the near-future - which current world events may indicate - it could be those middle and far eastern nations we know today. But if it occurs generations in the future there could be different geopolitical boundaries and national identities. Particularly under the rule of the antichrist as he takes a grip on the nations of the world. Frankly, who they are is not as important as why they will come. The answer, as we will see, is profound. The armies of the world will gather together for a common purpose -- to fight God, "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse [Jesus] and his army." (Revelation 19:19). Keep in mind, these "kings" will be political rulers and military leaders from around the world who follow the antichrist. They will

lead armies that could conceivably include hundreds-of-millions of people in total, all focused on destroying Jesus and His followers. These are those John spoke of as the, "...kings, generals and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." who will cross the Euphrates when God prepares the way for the nations of the world to come for battle. (Revelation 19:18).

13. "Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false-prophet."

13.a. - "Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs...;"

Obviously these are not real frogs but the symbolism helps us understand the vile, detestable and unclean nature of these impure spirits. These are demons; messengers of satan, coming to spread their lies and deception. Jesus spoke of similar "...impure spirits..." in Matthew 12:43. They are also like the impure spirits who fell before Jesus and confirmed His divine identity in Mark 3:11. And they are like the spirits who submitted to the seventy-two disciples in Luke 10:20. Each of these verses uses the same Greek term "pneumata" to speak of wicked spirits; more specifically here to - "akatharta pneumata" - unclean spirits. Nothing good can come from them.

13.b. - "... they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false-prophet."

And here we see their origin. They are the commands of satan, spoken through the antichrist and the false-prophet. They are the lies and deception spoken to the kings of the east to command their actions.

14. "They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out after the kings of the whole world, to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty."

14.a. - "They are demonic spirits that perform signs...",

satan's power to perform signs is manifest in these spirits. Recall in Egypt when Moses used the staff given to him by God to show God's power to the Pharaoh, the magicians of Egypt had powers too, "Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same thing by their secret arts:..." (Exodus. 7:11). Paul mentioned two of them to Timothy, "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth." (2 Timothy 3:8). Paul clarifies the source of such activities when he states they come from satan (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). In chapter 13 we also saw how the false-prophet will be gifted with demonic powers, "It [false-prophet] exercised all the authority of the first beast [antichrist] on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 13:12-14). The false-prophet's "...signs..." will convince the world's population to worship the antichrist. Then the three unclean and demonic spirits, speaking through satan to the antichrist and the false-prophet will command the sinful world's leaders to come together against God.

14.b. - "...and they go out after the kings of the whole world, to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty."

The demons go out, as messengers, but not just to the kings of the east. Now they go, "...to the whole world...". They go out with lies to convince and command the leaders of the world and their armies to gather for battle. As we will see starting in verse 16 this massive gathering is in preparation for a battle on the Plains of Megiddo. The place we know as Armageddon. (Revelation 16:16 / 19:19). A time spoken of in Psalms 2, "Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against the Anointed One. Let us break their chains, they say, and throw off their fetters. The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in wrath, saying, I have installed my King on Zion. My holy hill." (Psalms 2: 1-6). It is also the time prophesied by Zechariah, "A day of the Lord is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem...". (Zechariah 14:1-4).

The armies of man will come to fight God, but by preparing the way, the trap of God has now been set.

15. "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

15.a. - "Look, I come like a thief!..."

We saw the same event in chapter 14 (Revelation 14:1) when John gave us a preview of Christ returning as the Warrior King (Revelation 19:11). This is not the Rapture - which will by this point have already occurred - but speaks of Jesus returning to initiate His Second Coming - "The day of the Lord". Paul also spoke of Christ coming like a "thief" in the same context, "...for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.", (1 Thessalonians 5:2). The Day of the Lord is viewed by some as the combination of all Tribulation judgments. Others narrow down its timing to just the seven Bowls and maybe even the last Bowl. Either way it is an event that brings total destruction on mankind. An event described by Joel as the time when, "Before them the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, the stars no longer shine. The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it." (Joel 2:10-11).

As a believer, I've always thought the phrase "...come like a thief..." was an odd comment but a thief comes when he is least expected, in the dark of the night, or when no one is paying attention. In reality it shouldn't have to be that way during the Tribulation because mankind has been forewarned by God's word and given the knowledge he needs in order to avoid judgment. Jesus doesn't give mankind an exact day or time of His return, but He gives them enough information they shouldn't be surprised when He does. They should be able to see the events described in His word so they can be prepared. But sadly, mankind does not listen to God's word. If they did -- particularly during the Tribulation -- they would know exactly what was going to happen and when. Unfortunately, God has provided man a written road map to a grace-given eternity with

Him, but man takes his own road - the wide one - and finds it leads only to destruction. (Matthew 7:13-14).

15.b. - "Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

Nakedness is used in the Bible to describe sin., "She gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked..." (Genesis 3:6-7). In fact, it is the recognition of this nakedness -- their sin -- that is the first step in redemption, for it was the Lord who made a garment from a spotless animal with which to clothe them. (Genesis 3:21).

And with this Jesus will return. The seventh Bowl will now initiate the Second Coming of Christ as the Warrior King and the final destruction of the antichrist, the false-prophet and their demonic kingdom. We'll see this in our study of chapters 17 through 19. But for now, near the very end we are reminded of the words of Nahum about the Lord, "The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him." (Nahum 1:5-6).

LESSON 77

Revelation chapter 16, verse 16

Quick Recap and Looking Forward:

To begin our study of the seventh Bowl let's go back to the introduction of our lesson on chapter 6. There we discussed the first Seal judgments of God and looked ahead to the final judgment of the seventh Bowl. Here is an excerpt from that lesson:

After the Rapture and removal of the church from earth, Jesus will take the scroll from the Father's hand and begin to break the Seals. This will release four forces of judgment - false-peace, war, famine and death. Not only will this begin the first half of God's Tribulational judgment --- the seven year period known as the seventieth week of Daniel, but it also establishes an environment in-which the antichrist will begin building his base of satanic power. He will do this by using the fear, depression and wickedness that will result from the war, famine, disease and death of the first four Seals. It is through this chaos that people will be drawn to the antichrist as he begins to portray himself as their messiah -- the one who will bring peace to this mess. This peace will include a treaty with Israel in which he pretends to protect them; even allowing them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstate the sacrificial system. Through this chaos the antichrist will grow stronger and stronger, and as he does God will unleash even more destructive judgments -- each one much faster and more powerful than the last. The early Seals we've studied so far are the "birth pangs" spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 24:8) that will grow in intensity as each successive one is opened. The later Seals (6 and 7) will reveal even more cataclysmic judgments which come more frequently and with much more destructive power. The sixth Seal releases cosmic disturbances we can hardly imagine. These will send the world into total turmoil. Then as the seventh and final Seal is broken it releases seven "Trumpet" judgments, and when the seventh Trumpet is blasted it will release seven "Bowl" judgments. These are the final and most destruction judgments of all as God pours His wrath upon the earth.

We are now in that portion of our study, in chapter 16, verse 16 to see the catalyst behind the final Tribulation judgment action of God - the seventh Bowl. Two other judgments will occur after this -- the final post-millennial destruction of satan (Revelation 20:7-10) and the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) --, but other than those, the seventh Bowl is the last of the twenty-one judgments God will initiate during the seven year Tribulation. By this point the world and its population will be in a state of total chaos and panic. The unimaginable punishment of the first twenty judgments will have been released by God through seven Seals, seven Trumpets and the first six Bowls. These will render the earth nearly uninhabitable and mankind barely existing. Now at the seventh Bowl, God will lure mankind into a final battle. As satan, the antichrist and the false-prophet conceive a last-ditch effort to gather all of the fighting forces of the world into one place, God will "...prepare the way..." (Revelation 16:12) and lead them into a deadly trap. It is here mankind will hope to defeat God, but as we shall see, it is here they will be utterly destroyed.

Frankly, this is such a tragic ending. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Bible ended with a story describing how mankind finally recognized the grace of God and the gift of salvation through Jesus? Wouldn't it be a fitting end to God's patience towards mankind's sin if they would all turn

their hearts to Him? But that's not how it will be. Ever since man fell in the garden the majority of cultures and civilizations across the centuries have rejected God's gift. Over time some have accepted the Lord as our Savior, but Jesus tells us we are few in number (Matthew 7:13). But none will accept at the end of the Tribulation. After thousands of years of God seeking after man there will come a time when the gospel will fall only on deaf ears. By then mankind will be totally corrupt and spiritually deficient, and will seek God no more. Instead, they will blaspheme His name and form an army with the intent of defeating Him and His followers.

Looking forward to chapters 17-19:

The last six verses of chapter 16 provide details about the seventh Bowl judgment. It is during this time when Christ will return. We saw a preview of His return in chapter 14 (verse 1) and we'll see the details in chapter 19 (verse 11). If you'll recall, the seventh Trumpet in chapter 11 was followed by chapters 12, 13 and 14 that temporarily stepped away from the judgment narrative to provide additional information about satan (12), the antichrist and false-prophet (13) and Jesus (14). Similarly, after chapter 16 we'll again step away from the judgment narrative of the seventh Bowl and go to chapters 17 and 18 where we'll discuss the fall of the antichrist's demonic empire -- symbolized as the harlot Babylon, and sinful mankind's lamenting actions. Then chapter 19 will resume the judgment action and describe what will happen in chapter 16. Confusing? That's ok. We'll discuss it in detail and work through the sequence.

And with that, let's start our discussion of God's last tribulation judgment action -- the seventh Bowl.

16. "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. 17. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18. Then there came flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. 19. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. 21. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on the people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible."

16. "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."

16.a. - "Then they gathered the kings together..."

Earlier in chapter 16 John saw, "The sixth angel poured out his Bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false-prophet." "They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out after the kings of the whole world, to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16:13-14).

We learned that these "frogs" are actually demonic spirits used by satan, the antichrist and the false-prophet, to convince the leaders of the world to bring their forces together to fight against God. To facilitate this battle God will "...prepare the way...", by drying-up the Euphrates River so

the ...kings of the east..." can travel to Israel. There they will be joined by the "...kings of the whole world..." so that all of God's enemies will gather in one place --- on the Plains of Megiddo. More commonly known as Armageddon.

16.b. - "...to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."

Armageddon -- The word itself invokes fear and dread. Even to the most unchurched people know the word indicates war and death. That's because for centuries, authors, scholars, politicians, folklorist and Hollywood have used the word figuratively to describe a great cataclysmic event. The fact the term is used so often is interesting considering its original use in the Bible is only found in this one verse. The name comes from the Greek word Armageddon, that comes from the Hebrew, "Har Megiddo"; with Har meaning mountain or hill, and Megiddo being the name of a prominent hill overlooking the plain. Located about 60 miles north of Jerusalem, the plain is cited here in Revelation as the place where the end-times battle between Jesus and satan's demonic armies will be fought. Interestingly, it is also mentioned in Islamic eschatology in the Hadith (documented Islamic traditions - basically a practical commentary of the Quran) as "Al-Malhama Al-Kubra", or the place of the "great battle".

The Battle of Armageddon will be the culmination of the seventh Bowl judgment, when Jesus will return as the Warrior King to bring final destruction on man. (Revelation 19:11). It is the same event we discussed earlier in chapter 14, when, "They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia." (Revelation 14:20). Here we see "...the city...", Jerusalem, and the "...winepress outside the city..." which indicates the plains of Megiddo about 60 miles north of Jerusalem. The plain is a significantly important historical battlefield where:

- The Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III defeated the Canaanite Coalition in 1468 BC.
- Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites. - "Kings came, they fought. At Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo. (Judges 5:19).
- Josiah died in battle against Pharaoh Neco II in 609 BC. - "King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Necho faced him and killed him at Megiddo." (2 Kings 23:29).
- Gideon defeated the Midianites (Judges 7).
- The British defeated the Turks in WW-1 - giving the victorious general the nickname "Lord Allenby of Megiddo".

Napoleon said it was the greatest battlefield he had ever seen. He had no idea what an understatement that was, because it is here that Jesus will destroy the sinfully wicked inhabitants of Tribulational earth. --- "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." (Revelation 17:14). "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false-prophet who had performed miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh." (Revelation 19:19-21).

As 16:14 says this coalition of armies is "...to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16:13-14). But what does the "...great day..." really mean? As we've discussed many times throughout the Bible, we see God's judgments and wrath. Sometimes His judgment is on individuals, sometimes on a people group, city or nation, but in many places the Bible speaks of a horrific and catastrophic judgment in the end-times. All of these prophecies point to events in Revelation, but many speak to the final, all-destroying judgment at Armageddon.

Although the term Armageddon is only used once in the Bible, it was spoken of several times by the prophets and Jesus. As we move towards the end of this chapter it is good to review a few of these to put the rest of Revelation in the right context:

- "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, 'I am strong!' Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord! Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat [means "Yahweh Judges"], for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats will overflow - so great is their wickedness! Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of destruction." (Joel 3:9-13).
- "The Lord will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar against his land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against all who live on the earth. The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword." (Jeremiah 25:30-31).
- "Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against the Anointed One. Let us break their chains, they say, and throw off their fetters. The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in wrath, saying, I have installed my King on Zion. My holy hill." (Psalms 2: 1-6).
- "A day of the Lord is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls. I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem...". (Zechariah 14:1-4).
- "Before them the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, the stars no longer shine. The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it." (Joel 2:10-11).
- "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. Because of this, his hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. See, the day of the Lord is coming - a cruel day with wrath and fierce anger - to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and humble the pride of the ruthless. I will make man

scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger." (Isaiah 13:6-13).

- "I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground." (Isaiah 63:6).

There are many more prophecies in the Old Testament related to the day of the Lord. But for now, the verses above will put us in the right mindset as we complete our study of the seventh Bowl. --
- I also think it bears mentioning again the power we have to avoid this calamity by helping the lost see their need for Jesus, and thereby, be rescued from His wrath to come. As Jesus told His disciples, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of the night the thief is coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him." (Matthew 24:42-44).

LESSON 78

Revelation chapter 16, verses 17-18

Quick Recap:

Our discussion of the seventh Bowl set the stage by giving us a view of the physical and spiritual environment in which the final Bowl judgment will occur. The first six Bowls brought unbelievably destructive punishment on the earth and man. To the point that by the close of the sixth Bowl the world will be barely inhabitable and man will be covered in festering boils, baked alive by the sun and have no water to drink. Although the Bible doesn't say, we can probably assume that by that point in judgment mankind will have lost confidence in their dictator, the antichrist. Maybe that's why satan will have to use three powerfully deceptive demonic spirits to convince the leaders of the world to come together with their armies to fight against God and His people. But whatever signs or deception it takes to provoke them to come, the armies of the world will all converge on an area in northern Israel called the Plains of Megiddo, or, as more commonly known as Armageddon. Megiddo is a grand battlefield where armies have fought for thousands of years. From the Egyptian conquest of Canaan to World War I, nations have met and fought on what Napoleon described as the greatest battlefield he had ever seen.

Now let's move deeper into the seventh Bowl with verses 17 and 18.

17. "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18. Then there came flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake."

17. "The seventh angel poured out his Bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

17.a. - "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air...,"

The seventh Bowl appears to be administered a little different than the others. For comparison, let's look back to see how the first six Bowl judgments were poured:

- First - "...on the land..." - Festering sores will be inflicted on man.
- Second - "...on the sea..." - The oceans will be turned to blood.
- Third - "...on the river and springs of water..." - All sources of freshwater will be turned to blood and mankind will have no water to drink.
- Fourth - "...on the sun..." - Man will be tortured with intense heat and fire.
- Fifth - "...on the throne of the beast..." - The empire of the antichrist will be thrown into total spiritual and physical darkness.
- Sixth - "...on the great river Euphrates..." - This will make a way for man's armies to reach Israel.

In each of these cases the Bowls were described as being poured "...on..." something tangible; on the oceans, the rivers, the sun. But now the seventh and final Bowl is poured "...into the air..."; "epi ton aera" in Greek. Commentators provide several views of what this could mean:

- It may indicate judgment is poured on the entire earth's atmosphere - the physical layers of environment that surrounds the earth and protects it from the sun's heat and deadly ultraviolet rays. As we'll see, this interpretation may support an interesting view of later verses.
- Others believe "into the air" indicates the judgment will permeate the earth and everything on it.
- Still others believe it could indicate an attack on satan who Paul called, "...the ruler of the kingdom of the air..." (Ephesians 2:2). If so, it may be to cleanse the air and space of his demonic influence.
- Either way, it's obvious this judgment is administered differently than the others in that it is all encompassing, and as we will see, globally destructive.

17.b. - "... and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne...,"

Several times John has seen into God's temple in heaven or heard voices from within:

- In chapter 11, John saw, "...God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant." (Revelation 11:19).
- In chapter 14 John saw, "...another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." (Revelation 14:15).
- In the same chapter John saw two more angels come from the temple. One with a sickle and one who was in charge of fire who called in a loud voice to reap judgment on man.
- Earlier in chapter 16 John heard, "...a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." (Revelation 16:1).

Now later in chapter 16 John hears a loud voice from heaven, but this time there is no doubt who the voice is because, "...out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne...". This is the voice of God. Not only does the command come from within the temple but it comes, "...from the throne...", from His seat of power and authority.

17.c. - "...saying, "It is done!"

And what God says is short, but so amazingly profound, --- "It is done!".

- After thousands of years of grace and mercy offered to mankind, --- "It is done!"
- After untold billions of opportunities for man to turn from sin to the Lord, --- "It is done!"
- After the Son of God came to earth as the Son of Man to offer redemption and salvation through His personal sacrifice, --- "It is done!"
- After an unbroken chain of last-chance Tribulational gospel proclamations given through the 144,000, the Two Witnesses, the Proclaiming Angel and by those who maintained a, "...testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God.", --- "It is done!"

"It is done!" --- At this point mercy and grace will be gone and the gospel will not be spoken again. The fulfillment of God's prophetic message will be over and man will be totally depraved and victim to God's final, righteous and holy judgment, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when the righteous judgment will be revealed." (Romans 2:5).

"It is done!" --- At that time the words of the prophet Zephaniah will ring loud and true, "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord., "I will sweep away both

men and animals; I will sweep away birds of the air and fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth." (Zephaniah 1:2-3).

"It is done!". --- Where have we heard similar words before? When Jesus went to the cross He took on Himself the sin of mankind. This was the "cup" of wrath poured on Jesus by God. (Matthew 26:42 / Hebrews 2:9) . This was the wrath reserved for every sinful human that was accepted by God, as the sinless Christ, so that His holy sacrifice as the Spotless Lamb would be a purchase and pardon for our sin (Romans 3:25-26). At the point Jesus released His earthly body to an earthly death He said, "It is finished", (John 19:30). In Matthew's account Jesus, "...cried out again in a loud voice..." (Matthew 27:50). The loud voice was God's voice, manifest in the Son. The voice that cried, "It is finished."; "Tetelestai", which in Greek means "it is accomplished" or "paid in full". In this statement He proclaimed a completed task God had sent Him to do. Likewise, at the end of time God will shout, "It is done!"; "Gegonen!", "it has come to pass", "it was done", "it has taken place". In both cases, God's prophetic task will have been fulfilled. In the first, the Lamb of God accepted the wrath intended for man --- and offered salvation for all who will accept. --- But in the end, rejecting man will have to accept the wrath intended for himself because salvation will no longer be an option when the redemptive Lamb of God returns as the destroying Warrior Judge to accomplish His predetermined end-times task. Then, when He is complete --- "It is done!"

18. "Then there came flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake."

18.a. - "Then there came flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder..."

In John's first view of the throne room he witnessed the activity in heaven as Jesus, the Lamb prepared to open the first Seal (Revelation 5:7 / 6:1). As he watched these preparations John saw and heard, "From the throne came flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder." (Revelation 4:5). This appears to indicate God's judgment mood. A mood expressed in several other passages at various times in the Biblical timeline.

But here, at the seventh Bowl, we see a repeat of the same judgment mood we saw in God's commands for the seventh Seal and the seventh Trumpet:

- "When he opened the seventh Seal, there was silence in heaven for about half and hour."..."Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lighting and an earthquake." (Revelation 8:1 and 5).
- The seventh angel sounded his Trumpet..."..."And there came flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder, and earthquake and a severe hailstorm." (Revelation 11:15 and 19b).

Now in the seventh and final Bowl judgment we see the same mood, except this time mankind faces much higher stakes and the punishment will be unbelievably more severe.

18.b. - "...and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake."

In chapter 6 we talked a bit about earthquakes and their destructive power. So to set the stage for this final massive, worldwide earthquake, let's quickly review a few other places in the Bible's where earthquakes are mentioned:

- "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. (Exodus 19:17-18).
- "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it." (Matthew 28:2).
- "The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; He sits enthroned between the cherubim. Let the earth shake." (Psalms 99:1).
- "At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' (Hebrews 12:26).
- "Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day, in the day of His burning anger." (Isaiah 13:13).
- "In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the sovereign Lord." (Ezekiel 38:19-21).
- As Jesus cried out, "It is finished." (John 19:30), "...the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open." (Matthew 27:50-51).

Now in Revelation we see earthquakes mentioned several times (Revelation 8:1 and 5 / 11:15 and 19b). One of these will be particularly devastating for Israel., "At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." (Revelation 11:13). That earthquake will be the judgment on Jerusalem, to literally shake the Jewish people to their senses, and is probably the fulfillment of Paul's prophecy that "...all Israel will be saved..." (Romans 11:26). At least the one-third who survive the Tribulation and accept Christ as their Savior. (Zechariah 13:8). This is probably the point when they, "...look on the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child..." (Revelation 1:7 / Zechariah 12:10).

But the earthquake in chapter 16 will be so much more severe than anything mankind has ever seen before. In fact, as we'll see below this earthquake may very well be the actions God takes to restore the earth prior to the Millennial Kingdom. We see an indication of its severity in the prophecy of Haggai and Isaiah:

- "This is what the Lord Almighty says: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations..." "...I am going to shake the

heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother." (Haggai 2:6-7 and 21-22).

- "The earth is broken up, the earth split asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls -- never to rise again. In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders -- with great glory." (Isaiah 24:19-23).

LESSON 79

Revelation chapter 16, verses 19-21

Quick Recap:

Not only is this the last Bowl but it is the last of twenty-one Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments God will use to destroy the remnant of mankind. As we saw, the seventh angel poured his Bowl "...into..." the air. An indication that drastic environmental changes will be made that contribute to the eventual restoration of the earth in preparation for the return of Christ. As God calls "It is done!" the final judgment actions will include a massive earthquake, so powerful it will reshape the earth and level the landscape. Jerusalem will then be split by Jesus as He plants His feet on the Mount of Olives causing a spring will gush forth living water to restore the land. This will nourish Jerusalem for the returning King as He destroys the antichrist's empire, defeats His army at Armageddon and kills mankind with hail from heaven.

In the end, God will draw His armies from the whole world into a trap where He will utterly destroy every last person. Now as we will see, he will not only destroy His enemies but it appears He will use the seventh Bowl to reconstruct the earth in preparation for Christ's coming kingdom.

And with that, let's complete our study of the seventh Bowl.

19. "The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. 21. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on the people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible."

19. "The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath."

19.a. - "The great city split into three parts....,"

Undoubtedly the "...great city..." is Jerusalem. We see this in chapter 11 when the Two Witnesses are killed by the antichrist, "Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city..." "...where also their Lord was crucified." (Revelation 11:8). Interestingly, it appears it is at this time when the remnant of Jerusalem - and probably Israel in general - will be judged by an earthquake. We see this in verse 13, "At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to God." (Revelation 11:13). From the prophet Zechariah we know that only a third of Israel will survive the Tribulation, "In the whole land", declares the Lord, 'two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left it in. This third I will put into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.' (Zechariah 13: 8-10). It is probably these Jews, the one-third who remain after judgment who will flee, "...into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days." (Revelation 12:6).

So if Jerusalem will have already been judged and punished by this point then what is happening in verse 19 when the city will be "...split into three parts..."? It appears this may be when Jerusalem will be restored in preparation for the coming King and His kingdom. Zechariah tells us, "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity." (Zechariah 13:1). This will happen when - as John previously saw - "...the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion..." returns as the Righteous Judge. (Revelation 14:1). This is the point of the Second Coming when, "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south."..."On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter." (Zechariah 14:4 and 8).

This is speaking of Jerusalem:

- The city Jesus loves, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...". (Matthew 23:37).
- The city He chose from all Israel, "But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe." (1 Kings 11:32).
- The place where, "...I have chosen as a dwelling place for my name." (Nehemiah 1:9).
- The site of His future reign when, "...they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord." (Jeremiah 3:17).
- The, "...city of our God, his holy mountain. Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King." (Psalms 48:1-2). - "For the Lord Most High is awesome, the Great King over all the earth." (Psalms 47:2).

Hallelujah!

Jerusalem will be judged for their sin, but at the end of the Tribulation she will be nourished by God. In a land bruised and baked by judgment, in a place where all water is putrid blood, in a world that can no longer sustain life, God will refresh the land and its people with a spring of living water. Water that will travel east and west to restore the earth. A fitting and restored place for the throne of our King. As king David said, "...the God of Israel, has granted rest to his people and has come to dwell in Jerusalem forever." (1 Chronicles 23:25 / Micah 4:7).

19.b. - "...and the cities of the nations collapsed."

But the earthquake destroys all other cities of the world. Try to wrap your head around that for just a moment. Tens-of-thousands of cities and towns around the world, who will hold hundreds-of-millions of Tribulation residents will be simultaneously and completely demolished. The death-toll in that event will be staggering and the dwellings of man will be uninhabitable. We get a glimpse of what this might be like from Jeremiah, "I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and the heavens and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger." (Jeremiah 4:23-26).

19.c.- "God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath."

Babylon the Great, the adulteress empire and infrastructure of the antichrist will be totally destroyed. In Genesis God scattered the idolatrous people of Babel around the world (Genesis 11:8), but in the end God will scatter her namesake, the sinful people of Babylon to hell. - "A prophecy against Babylon that Isaiah son of Amos saw..."..."Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. Because of this, all hands will go limp, every heart will melt with fear. Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. See, the day of the Lord is coming - a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger - to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it." (Isaiah 13:1 and 6-9 -- We will discuss the destruction of Babylon in more detail in chapters 17 and 18.)

20. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found."

We saw a preview of this event back in chapter 6 and the sixth Seal, "The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place." (Revelation 6:14). But here verse 20 may indicate the Bowl poured "...into the air..." (Revelation 16:17) impacts the entire atmosphere and will play a role in reconstructing and restoring the earth. In chapter 20 the current earth and universe will be destroyed, "The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them." (Revelation 20:11 / 2 Peter 3:10-13). Then they will be recreated as "...a new heaven and a new earth." (Revelation 21:1). Not restored, but completely remade. Recreated as God originally intended - as an Eden where believing man will live with God forever. (Revelation 22).

The massive, worldwide earthquake here in chapter 16 could be the instrument God uses to reconstruct the earth suitable for Christ's Millennial Kingdom. The mountains will be leveled, including those in the oceans which form islands. We cannot begin to comprehend the full extent of what this means to the earth's environment, but the atmospheric shift and the leveling of the earth indicates a restoration in preparation for Christ's reign. Isaiah saw this and provides a related prophecy often quoted in reference to John the Baptist making a way for the first coming of Jesus. (Matthew 3:3). But if you read further down the passage we can see that it also relates to preparations for the Second Coming of Christ, "A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all the people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Isaiah 40:4-5).

21. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on the people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible."

We saw a preview of this event at the seventh Trumpet, "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm." (Revelation 11:19). Now the judgment mood of hail seen in heaven is cast upon the earth. But this is not normal hail. These stones will be huge, "Talantiaia", in Greek, which is the weight of a talent, or about one hundred pounds. An indication of their great size, and maybe even another indication of a great atmospheric change (V17) that would produce ice rocks of such weight. In comparison, the largest hailstone recorded on earth was roughly one pound, so this will literally

be hail of "Biblical proportions." God has used hail in other times as a judgment on man, and in some cases it is a forewarning of His final Tribulation judgment:

- When God punished Egypt for their slavery of the Hebrew people He killed them with hail., "So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; hail fell and lightening flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields - both people and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were." (Exodus 9:23-26).
- Isaiah prophesied that in the end, "The Lord will cause people to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail." (Isaiah 30:26-30).
- When Israel fought under Joshua, "As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites." (Joshua 10:11).
- "I will execute judgment on him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and his troops and on the many nations with him." (Ezekiel 38:22).

But the hailstones of Armageddon will be unlike anything in history. These large ice blocks, falling from space at terminal velocity, and unhindered by the resistant forces of our atmosphere will probably travel hundreds-of-miles an hour and crash into earth with devastating results. Since they are falling on the earth's population it is conceivable there will be millions of them crashing to earth; targeted on mankind. But they will not free-fall haphazardly and hit open land, oceans or buildings. These will be "smart bombs" with deadly accuracy as they "...fell on people...".

But those who survive the hail will still be destroyed in the battle with God. But not before they curse His name - never to repent.

So this will mark the end of the Tribulation judgments. The seventh Bowl is the last of twenty-one Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments that bring devastating punishments on man, earth and the universe. It will end when mankind is destroyed, the antichrist and the false-prophet are thrown into hell, and satan is held captive for a thousand years in the abyss. The combination of the massive earthquake and atmospheric changes of the seventh Bowl appear to reshape the earth through the hands of God. Life as it has been known to us will be no more. The landscape will be fundamentally altered as God restores the earth for the short thousand-year reign of Christ. Then at the end of that era all of the original and sin-marred creation will be gone and God will newly create an Eden-like heaven, earth and Jerusalem for us, His faithful followers, whose sins were borne in death by the Spotless Lamb and defeated in the victory of His resurrected life.

Hallelujah to our glorious King! The battle is already won.

LESSON 80

Revelation, chapter 17 verses 1-5

Quick Recap:

Through these seven Seal, seven Trumpet and seven Bowl judgments God will punish and eventually destroy the sinful remnant of mankind. We also saw that the last of these actions appear to repair the earth in preparation for Christ's coming kingdom. The study of these judgments should have rendered our hearts even more broken for the lost. It is so sad to think of mankind refusing to turn to God for redemption and salvation even at a time when He openly proclaims the gospel in mid-air to the whole world. (Revelation 14:6).

Granted, it is a harsh reality that those who refuse God's free gift of salvation will fall under His firm hand of wrath. But as harsh and absolute as God's judgments may be we must remember His actions are justified. As we look back on the sin of mankind and his continuous rejection of God's gift of salvation, we come to realize His judgment is holy and righteous because He has and will give every opportunity for mankind to repent. Over the centuries God has been so patient, wishing that no one would perish (2 Peter 3:9). Even to the point of sending Himself, in the person of Jesus, as a holy sacrifice for man's sin. (John 3:17). But even Jesus was rejected by the very men and women who should have accepted His offer of eternal grace. And that rejection, as we have seen, will continue through time and even escalate during the Tribulation. As a result, God's ultimate and eventual judgment comes down to one thing --- He is holy --- and because God is holy He cannot tolerate the unredeemed sin of man or let it enter His kingdom. (Habakkuk 1:13). Sin must and will be punished. For a believer, it was punished for us on the cross, but for a non-believer punishment will begin either at their individual deaths or in the judgment death of the Tribulation. Either way, their punishment will be justified and eternal. It is the time prophesied by Paul when, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." (Romans 1:18).

As long as there is a pre-Rapture earth God will continue to openly offer redemption to man through acceptance in Christ. Even after the Rapture God will continue to offer salvation part-way into the Tribulation, but at some point mercy will come to an end. At that time, and in accordance with His predetermined timeline, God will prepare the earth for the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, and later recreate His New Heaven and New Earth so that He may dwell forever among His redeemed followers (Revelation 21). This will be a place of perfection, as it was in Eden, where no sin can be allowed -- not even one. That means no one can enter God's eternal kingdom based on their own efforts because their own actions could never outweigh even a single sin against God. It is only through the sin-cleansing atonement of Christ's sacrifice and our acceptance of Him as our Savior that we can avoid God's wrath. That is the essence of the gospel. (Romans 6:23). Until then, God will make every possible effort for mankind to accept His grace, even during the Tribulation period, but a time will come when mankind will be so totally depraved in sin (Romans 1:28). They will not repent and therefore must be judged, and if found unredeemed, must be destroyed. This systematic destruction is what we have seen in the twenty-one judgments of God. God's final warning for those who remain at that time. His judgments will purge creation of all sin and sinners so that His recreated heaven and earth will be a pure dwelling place for his people.

Now in chapters 17 and 18 the Lord provides more detail about what will happen during the final Bowl judgments. Here He describes the destruction of the evil empire of the antichrist -- "Babylon the Great the Mother of Prostitutes." In the broadest sense this is a title for the combined one-world government, financial, military and religious infrastructure of the antichrists' empire. In chapter 17 the use of the term "Mother of Prostitutes", speaks specifically to the religious element of the false-prophet. Chapter 18 will then speak to the government and economic face of his empire. It will be the false-prophet's role to bring a single demonic pagan religion to the world. This will be the catalyst that will draw the world's people together into one spiritual mindset. Eventually this will culminate in worship of the antichrist as a god.

Through these two chapters we will better understand how the Bowl judgments will destroy the religious underpinning of the evil empire, and how the government and military arm will be destroyed by the returning King of kings.

These are very complex chapters with much imagery, so let's get started by breaking them down and being blessed by God as He reveals His word to us.

Hallelujah.

1. "One of the angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. 2. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." 3. Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. 5. The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon The Great The Mother of Prostitutes And of The Abominations Of The Earth."

1. "One of the angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters."

1.a. - "One of the angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me,..."

This statement links the narrative in chapters 17 and 18 to the earlier Bowl judgments in chapter 16. One of the angels who will participate in the Bowl judgments is sent by God to explain the details to John. His role is to show John the destruction of the antichrist's empire. We will see a similar event in chapter 21 which we'll discuss as part of verse 3 below.

1.b. - "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute...,"

The angel beckons John to come with him so he can "show" him the future events surrounding the destruction of the antichrist's empire. The term prostitute ("whore" in the KJV, "harlot" in other interpretations) is from the Greek word "porne" or "porneia". This can mean what you would normally think it means, but it can also mean "an idolater" or "to be unfaithful to God". Here, in reference to Babylon it speaks to the spiritual sin of idolatry that will run rampant during the Tribulation. You'll recall from our earlier discussions, the term "Babylon" in Revelation describes the antichrist's one-world empire during the Tribulation. It relates back to the ancient people of

Babel who attempted to put themselves above God and make a spiritual name for themselves. At that time they were one people, with one language and one belief system - a pagan system that sought to be separated from God. When God scattered them across the earth they took their pagan beliefs with them (Genesis 11) and over time, these cultures, and their beliefs have morphed into the various pagan religions we see around the world today -- which nearly all include some form of idol worship. During the Tribulation the false-prophet will seek to reunite these various pagan strains; first as a combined religion and then for the worship of the antichrist.

As used here, the term "prostitute" linked to the name Babylon emphasizes the demonic spiritual realm of the future empire led by the antichrist and supported by the false-prophet. He will deceive the whole world and lead them completely away from the true God, using signs and wonders to set them in a frenzied worship of the beast (Revelation 13:12). Somewhat related to this is the Bible's use of the word "adultery". This is not the same root word as "prostitution", but it is used to describe the act of unfaithful love and is often associated with idolatry. Here are a few examples:

- "During the reign of king Josiah, the Lord said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done?" She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there." (Jeremiah 3:6).
- "I will set my face against anyone who turns to mediums and spiritualists to prostitute themselves by following them, and I will cut them off from their people." (Leviticus 20:6).
- "Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood." (Jeremiah 3:8a-9).

These verses describe ancient times when Israel turned away from God to prostitute themselves to the worship of idols. In a sense they committed spiritual adultery because they focused their love on someone other than God, "Only acknowledge your guilt - you have rebelled against the Lord your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me.", declares the Lord. "Return, you faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband..." (Jeremiah 3:13-14). But spiritual adultery is not limited to Israel. In fact, there are probably more idol worshipers on the earth today than at any other time in history. It is estimated there are currently 1.6 billion hindus, 535 million buddhists and 232 million animists, who all worship idols. And that's not counting the 1.4 billion catholics who have an unbiblical spiritual fascination with graven images of Mary and the saints. Based on this, you can see why it will be very easy for the false-prophet to bring the suffering Tribulation world together. First, into a single pagan religion, and later in the worship of the antichrist himself when the false-prophet will "...set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived." (Revelation 13:12 and 14). These will be the times when, "The whole world was astonished and followed the beast." (Revelation 13:3). These will be the times when the final vestige of mankind will be so removed from God there will be no redemption left.

1.c. - "...who sits by many waters."

Many waters indicates the global influence of the antichrist's rule and the extent of the false-prophet's spiritual influence. Verse 15 clarifies this when the angel tells John, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are the peoples, multitudes, nations and languages." A clear indication that by this point the empire of the antichrist is worldwide as he "...sits...", or rules over his kingdom, and as the false-prophet presides over a world-wide demonic religion.

2. "With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

In chapter 16 we saw how satan's demonic spirits, "...gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (Revelation 16:16). This is the time when all of the nations of the world will align with the kingdom of the antichrist because, "...he deceived the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 13:14). They will be the leaders and residents of the Tribulation earth. The remnants of mankind who will set their face against God and His followers, and will fully reject His offer of grace. Not only will they align with the antichrist from a government, financial and military perspective, but they and their people will align with the false-prophet in his pagan idolatry. There will be no room left on earth for believers in Christ. The few that believe will be killed. The remainder of mankind will be drunk with sinful worship by the spiritual adultery they commit.

But the time will come when the antichrist's empire and her rulers will be destroyed, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." (Revelation 14:8). This will include all of those who, "...worships the beast and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength unto the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb." (Revelation 14:9-10).

3. "Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns."

3.a. - "Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit..."

When John first began his journey through what would become the book of Revelation he was "...in the Spirit...", (Revelation. 1:10), which simply means he was under the divine power of the Holy Spirit and given the ability to see the actual events that would occur in the last days. Here John is "...carried..." - another physical action - and again given the power to see what would happen in the distant future. I believe John's repeated use of terms like, "...I wept..." (Revelation 5:1), "...I was given...", (Revelation 11:1), "...there before me...", (Revelation 14:1 and 14), "...I saw...", (Revelation 5:1 / 7:1 / 10:1 / 13:1 / 14:6 / 15:1), "...I heard...", (Revelation 16:1) and "...he carried me away..." (Revelation 21:10), all indicate John's vision was more than a dream. I believe God enabled John to see with his eyes and hear with his ears the events that will one day occur. We will see a similar event later in chapter 21 when one of the Bowl angels will show John the opposite of the woman on the beast. At that point he will show John the righteous and redeemed Bride of Christ. The New Jerusalem, the eternal seat of the eternal King, and the imagery of all redeemed believers and the true and Raptured church, "One of the seven angels who had the seven Bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." (Revelation 21:9-10).

3.b. - "... into the wilderness."

The angel carried John into a desolate place. This may indicate what the world will look like at the end of the Bowl judgment period. The word used here for wilderness is "eremon" in Greek. The same word used to describe the place where Jesus was tempted by satan (Matthew 4:1). The same word used in Matthew 14:13 to describe the secluded place where Jesus went to pray. It is

also the same word used in Revelation 12:14 to describe the hidden place where God will send Israel for "...a time, times and half a time.". Clearly, the word used here in chapter 17 indicates the angel is taking John to a place of desolation and solitude so he can see the destruction of Babylon.

3.b. - "There I saw a woman..."

The image of a woman has often been used to personify spirituality. In ancient Greek Hellenistic culture homage was given to women gods such as athena, aphrodites and artemis. Likewise, the Romans worshiped parallel gods like minerva and diana. Even the Israelites, in their cycles of spiritual adultery often worshiped asherah and built idols in her name. We see similar, but rarely recognized, idolatry today in the catholic church when they bow before and pray to a statue of Mary or a saint - the graven image of a person and in direct disobedience to God's will. (Exodus. 20:4 / Romans 1:23). We also see the feminine personification of a woman in the description of Israel in Revelation 12:1, and even of the church, the "bride" in Revelation 21:2. But here in chapter 17 the term "...woman..." speaks to the religious element of the antichrist's kingdom. The time when the false-prophet will bring the world together into a single pagan religion.

3.c. - "... sitting on a scarlet beast..."

In this imagery, the "...woman...", the demonic pagan belief system and religious element of the antichrist's empire, is "...sitting..." on the beast - the antichrist. We know from chapter 13, "...the whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast..." (Revelation 13:3). It appears, the early efforts of the false-prophet will bring the world's pagan religions together in a single religious focus, but at the mid-point of the Tribulation, when the antichrist enters the temple and declares himself to be God (Daniel 9:27), the false-prophet will set-up an image (idol) of the antichrist in the temple (Revelation 13:15) and the world will then worship the antichrist as their god. (Revelation 13:12). But we will see later in chapter 17 when it appears the antichrist will turn on the "...woman..." and destroy her. Many commentators believe this means he will destroy the singular pagan religion established by the false-prophet and replace it with a religion focused on worshipping him.

Here in verse 3, the woman is seen "...sitting..." or supported by the scarlet beast. Some might think this means she is sitting on satan because he is described as "red" in chapter 12 (Revelation 12:3), but that verse uses a different Greek word, "pyros." Here the Greek for scarlet, "kokkinon", is the same root word used for the purple or scarlet robe draped over Jesus when He was scourged prior to His crucifixion (Matthew 27:28), which is a color often associated with royalty (Daniel 5:29). It was worn by Roman magistrates and by rulers of the Byzantine Empire. In any case, the imagery here seems to represent the religious element of the antichrist's demonic and royal empire.

3.d. - "...that was covered with blasphemous names..."

The woman combined with the beast represents the empire of the antichrist; both the religious and governmental elements of his short-lived demonic rule. Everything about his empire is blasphemous. Everything the empire does is against God. Every action, every thought, every activity of its leader and his followers will be against everything God stands for. These actions and thoughts are the blasphemous names that cover his empire. The prophet Daniel spoke of this when he said, "He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people..."

(Daniel 7:25). "The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods." (Daniel 11:36). Paul further emphasizes the antichrist's anti-God actions, "He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." (2 Thessalonians 2:4). The fact he is "...covered..." with blasphemies is seen in John's description of the antichrist in chapter 13, "The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven." (Revelation 13:5-6).

3.e. - "...and had seven heads and ten horns."

We will discuss this in more detail when we get to verse 8-14.

4. "The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries."

4.a. - "The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls..."

These elements illustrate the royalty (purple and scarlet) and wealth (gold, precious stones and pearls) of the antichrist's empire and religion. When reading this I can't help but think of the "prosperity gospel" that is growing amongst apostate churches today. Sometimes called "Health and Wealth Gospel" or the "Gospel of Success" it teaches that financial blessings and physical health are signs of God's work in your life and show the strength of your faith. At its core this belief system promotes idolatry because its followers are more focused on material blessings and success than they are on following Christ or His word. Sadly, this movement continues to grow in the American church today. That's what I think of when I see the religion of the antichrist described in words of wealth. It is this promise of health and wealth in a troubled world that lures unsuspecting people into these cultist belief systems today and will lead Tribulation man to chase the same sinful dreams.

4.b. - "She held a golden cup in her hand filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries."

In his end-times prophecy Jeremiah gives us a preview of what we see here. Not only does it describe the initial destruction of the ancient city of Babylon (Daniel 5:30), but also points to the final and total destruction of the future Babylon, the empire of the antichrist., "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord's vengeance; he will repay her what she deserves. Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have gone mad. Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her! Get balm for her pain; perhaps she can be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and go to our own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the heavens." (Jeremiah 51:6-9).

The Psalmist alluded to this as well when he said, "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction." (Psalms 137:8). This may be the time we now see at the end of the Tribulation. A time when the antichrist's worldwide empire will be destroyed, "Lift up a banner against the walls of Babylon!"

Reinforce the guard, station the watchmen, prepare and ambush! The Lord will carry out his purpose, his decree against the people of Babylon. You who live by many waters and are rich in treasures, your end has come, the time for you to be cut off." (Jeremiah 51:12-13).

5. "The name written on her forehead was a mystery: Babylon The Great The Mother of Prostitutes And of The Abominations Of The Earth."

And here we see the vile name associated with the apostate, heretical and idolatric religion of the Tribulation - the worship of the antichrist.

- Mystery Babylon- from the Greek word "Mysterion". This is not something that can't be understood, but is what can be known through revelation. Here in chapter 17 God reveals the mystery of who the woman Babylon really is. (See Revelation 14:8).
- The Great The Mother of Prostitutes - As we have seen, the word prostitution, as used here is a symbol for idolatry. During the Tribulation the false-prophet will unite all non-God focused belief systems into a single religion. This religion, the "mother", will draw all other adulterous religions to her.
- And of The Abominations Of The Earth." - literally, all sin, of all men, of all time. All of the vile, evil, disobedience to God. The word comes from the Greek "bdelygmation" which means "emits a foul odor, disgustingly abhorrent and detestable." Often used in association with idolatry, which is an abomination to God. A fitting name for an empire of satan.

This is the name of the religion and more broadly the empire of the antichrist. As we move through the rest of chapter 17 and 18 we will find comfort in the fore-knowledge that Jesus will be victorious over all of this.

LESSON 81

Revelation, chapter 17 verses 6-11

Quick Recap:

This portion of Revelation is a little confusing because it is not in chronological order. So let's quickly review the structure of the last several chapters to remind ourselves how they relate to chapter 17:

- Chapter 15 provided a prelude to the seven Bowl judgments and a wonderful view of the Tribulation Saints praising God for their rescue and redemption. It essentially connects the start of the first Bowl judgment in chapter 16 with the blowing of the seventh Trumpet judgment in chapter 11. Between chapters 11 and 15 are chapters 12, 13 and 14 which provided background information on satan, the antichrist, the false-prophet and an initial view of Christ's Second Coming.
- Chapter 16 discussed each of the Bowl judgments in some detail, gave us a view into the final destruction of sinful mankind and the end of the Tribulation, and indicated God's preparations for Christ's Millennial Kingdom.
- Chapters 17 and 18 step back to give us more information about what will happen during the seven Bowl judgments in chapter 16. Chapter 17 focuses on the religious element of the antichrist's empire and chapter 18 will discuss the government, economic and military segments. Both give us more detail about what will happen back in chapter 16 and how the empire of the antichrist will be destroyed.
- In our last lesson we started chapter 17 and covered verses 1-5. This introduced us to the religious arm of the antichrist's Tribulation empire which appears to be a pagan belief system used by the false-prophet to unite the people of the world around a single demonic religion. This unity will serve to focus the attention of the entire world away from God by drawing everyone into some form of pagan worship. This religious system is referred to as a "woman" who is labeled as a spiritual harlot. This symbolism represents the pagan idolatry of the antichrist's empire used by the antichrist to gain control of the population. But at some point, probably at the three-and-a-half year mid-point of the Tribulation, the antichrist will enter the temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God. He will then destroy the pagan religion led by the false-prophet and refocus man's spiritual worship on him. (Daniel 9:27 / 2 Thessalonians 2:9 / Revelation 13:12 / Revelation 17:16).

Both the religion and empire are aptly named - "Babylon The Great The Mother of Prostitutes And of The Abominations Of The Earth." The name is reflective of the ancient peoples of Babel who turned against God and sought to be above God (Genesis 11). Although it symbolizes both the empire and religion of the antichrist, the term "Mother of Prostitutes" points specifically to the demonic idolatry of the end-times religion --- which is an abomination to God.

Chapter 12 links John's description of satan with his later description of the antichrist in chapters 13 and 17. To better understand the characterization of the antichrist we skipped ahead to chapter 17 to discuss more detail that is provided there.

And with that background let's move into verses 6 through 11.

6. "I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the ones who bore the testimony of Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. 7. The angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. 8. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. 9. This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. 10. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. 11. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction."

6. "I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the ones who bore the testimony of Jesus."

6.a. - "I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints..."

As we saw in verse 2 this imagery is used to describe the false-prophet's religion that is "...intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." Now in verse 6 we see what they will be drunk on; "...the blood of the saints." Several times we have discussed those who come to Christ during the Tribulation. They will be fugitives unmarked by the antichrist and a target for every non-believer on earth. They will be rooted-out and hunted down by the antichrist's government, the military and even their friends and family. It is this time when the antichrist will declare that, "...all who refused to worship the image to be killed." (Revelation 13:15). This is the blood on which the antichrist's religion feeds its sinful appetite and becomes drunk with the murder of God's people.

6.b. - "...the ones who bore the testimony of Jesus."

But who are these on which the woman feeds? They are the believers we discussed in chapter 15, standing before the throne of God and praising His name. They are those who missed the Rapture and came to Jesus during the Tribulation period. Those, "...who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name." (Revelation 15:2). Those who refused to accept the false-prophets' pagan religion, and refused to worship the antichrist. They will be some of the most persecuted yet faithful believers of all time.

- Jesus spoke of them as, "...those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image..." (Revelation 20:4-5).
- He also talked about them in the Olivet Discourse as those who will be, "...handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me." (Matthew 24:9).
- They are the ones, "...to be killed..." for refusing to worship the beast. (Revelation 13:15).
- Those who, "...could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast...", because they refused to take its mark.
- And, they will be the ones who will fill the murderous appetite of Babylon the harlot empire and religion, "... with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 17:6).

O Lord, may our own lives be such a powerful testimony of Jesus and of Your word.

6.c. - "...When I saw her, I was greatly astonished..."

In his journey through what would become the book of Revelation John has seen and heard some pretty amazing things. In most cases he handles them well, but here we see a more intense reaction when John was "...greatly astonished...". A phrase that comes from the Greek word "ethaumasa", which means "marveled", "wondered", "awestruck" or "to be amazed". Clearly a term used to show an intense reaction on John's part when he realizes that what he sees is the extreme apostate nature of the false-prophet's religion.

7. "The angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns."

7.a. - "The angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides..."

The angel recognizes John's astonishment and helps him understand that the "...woman..." riding the beast illustrates the relationship between the demonic religion and the empire that supports her.

7.b.plus 8 - "...which has the seven heads and ten horns... 8. "The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come."

We will discuss verses 7b and 8 in the section below from our earlier lesson.

To help John better understand who the antichrist is that supports the false religion, the angel describes the beast as having "...seven heads and ten horns...". Now, to understand what verses 7 and 8 mean let's go back and review our lesson on chapter 12 verse 3 which also included a discussion of chapter 17, verses 8-11.

Excerpt from Chapter 12 verse 3...

12:3.b. - "...with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads."

This same imagery is seen in chapter 13, but there applied to the scarlet beast; the antichrist, "The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each a blasphemous name." (Revelation 13:1). This describes the antichrist, who during the Tribulation will be completely under the control of the dragon and therefore takes on his characteristics. These are not physical characteristics, but as we will see they symbolize the evil empire of satan, manifesting itself in the world-controlling kingdom of the antichrist. This is now confirmed here in chapter 17. "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." (Revelation 17:9-11). Here in very complex imagery John describes the seven heads as seven hills. This has led some scholars to believe the seven heads represent the seven hills on which Rome is built. But we must note that John clarifies for

us that understanding this passage "...calls for a mind with wisdom." (Revelation 17:9). In other words, the meaning of this passage is not as straight-forward as it might appear so we need to apply spiritual wisdom in order to understand it. Or said another way, simply interpreting the seven hills as the seven hills of Rome is just too easy because that answer wouldn't take spiritual wisdom to figure it out. As we see in 17:9, the seven hills refer to seven kings, the heads of seven empires who over the centuries have sought to destroy Israel. These are not the only kingdoms who warred with Israel over time, but they are the most powerful of the ancient empires who sought to control the world of their day. More importantly, based on scripture, they were obviously part of satan's plan to annihilate Israel.

Many nations have sought to destroy Israel. For example, Jerusalem, her ancient capital, has been besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, recaptured 44 times and destroyed twice. But through all of this there have been six ancient and significant empires whose armies sought to wipe out the Hebrew people. Why? Because ever since his expulsion from heaven, satan's focus has been on revenge through the destruction of God's plan, defeat of God's Son and disillusion of God's chosen nation through which the Messiah would come to earth. But after satan failed to achieve that goal, he sought (still seeks) to destroy Israel by influencing them to turn away from God so they would not be the source of God's redemptive gospel message to the world. A message that today is largely carried by the church, but as we will see, that in itself does not change God's future plans for Israel as His chosen people.

Of all the nations and kingdoms satan has used to persecute Israel most conservative Revelation scholars believe the ones who represent the dragon's seven heads and crowns include: 1. Egypt, 2. Assyria, 3. Babylon, 4. Medo-Persia, 5. Greece, and 6. Rome. That leaves the seventh head, which as we will see, also becomes the eighth head. This is clarified in 17:10 where John tells us the seven hills, "...are also seven kings...".

Of which:

- "...Five have fallen..." --- these would have been five warring nations that were already destroyed prior to John's time --- Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece.
- "...one is..." --- John is now speaking in the present tense because when he wrote this chapter Rome was still in power.
- The five who had already fallen plus the one who "is" equals six. This leaves one future seventh empire.
- The seventh is "...the other has not yet come...". This indicates a future kingdom, but which one? Some contend the seventh empire was Nazi Germany. This is understandable considering the obvious demonic actions of Hitler. Others believe it could be a future islamic caliphate; a confederation of muslim nations focused on destroying Israel. This is also conceivable given the fact several nations and multiple radical islamic terrorist groups have avowed to destroy Israel. But the Bible seems to dispel both of these notions with the next part of the verse, -- "...the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction."

Let's break this down a bit:

- "...the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while." - So who is "he"? This verse seems to speak of a person, not an empire, but it also speaks of him

as a king, who is the head of an empire. A king who is only on the scene for a short period of time.

- This is clarified by the next part of the passage, "The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." The beast is the antichrist, who through the dragon's power becomes "...the other has not yet come...". The future leader of a satan-controlled world empire and false religion who will become the arch enemy of God, Israel and all believers. He "...belongs to the seven...", which means he is one of the seven empire heads, but he will also be the eighth king. How? Because it appears from scripture the antichrist will come on the scene at the beginning of the Tribulation (the white horse and rider in Revelation 6:2. He will then build his evil power base and control the world, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast..." (Revelation 13:8). But at some point he will be mortally wounded and appear to die. He will then appear to come back to life, further convincing the lost world he is a divine being and worthy of praise. "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast." (Revelation 13:3). "The beast [antichrist], which you saw, once was, [past tense] now is not, [was gone] and yet will come up [appear to recover] out of the abyss...". (Revelation 17:8). There are a number of interpretations for this verse but many scholars believe this apparent death and resurrection is how the antichrist appears to die and come back to life. And when he does he will be, "... an eighth king." He is the one who has not yet come (speaking of the future), but when he does he will "...remain for a little while...". This short period of time speaks of the Tribulation, which is only seven years, and at the height of his reign lasts three and a half years. Sadly, the world who would not accept the true death and resurrection of Christ will now accept the false death and resurrection of the antichrist. "He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy those who are mighty, the holy people." (Daniel 8:24).
- But his power will come to an end when he "...is going to his destruction." As we'll see in chapter 19 his destruction comes when Jesus returns as the Warrior King and destroys the antichrist and his followers, "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and His army. But the beast was captured, and with it the false-prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf." "The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur." (Revelation 19:19-20). -- At this point, the seventh king "...who once was..." and the eighth king he will become are destroyed forever.

12.3.c. - "...and ten horns..."

Here the imagery is similar to that of the seven heads. Most commentators believe the ten horns (horns represent power in the Bible) are ten nations or ten divisions of the antichrist's empire who will fight against Jesus in Revelation 19. We see another indication of this in Daniel 7, where he speaks of ten horns and ten kings. Daniel sees these in a vision of the antichrist who will, "...speak against the Most High and oppress the saints and try to change the set times and the law. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times, and half a time." (Daniel 7:24-25). Clearly, the terminology used here indicates the last half of the Tribulation when the antichrist and his army of nations are at their most powerful. These are the kings referred to in Revelation 19 who come to battle against Jesus. Many Revelation scholars believe the antichrist's infrastructure will arise from the nations of Europe, and area many historians link to ten ancient people-groups who became Europeans. Further, many believe he will rise from a

revised Roman empire. But in any case, it is clear the antichrist will rule the world in concert with a group of the world's most powerful and evil leaders.

Hopefully that helps you better understand the linkage between chapters 12, 13, and 17, and the relationship between the antichrist's empire and his demonic religion.

To summarize:

- The "woman" - personifies the pagan religion of the false-prophet used to bring the world together into one demonic belief system. She is the harlot "Mother" whose followers prostitute themselves through their abominations. Her name is Mystery Babylon.
- The beast she rides - is the antichrist and his demonic empire. The religion is what brings the world together under his rule so his government and economic systems can flourish. As we will see in chapter 18, his empire is also called Babylon - Babylon the great.
- The seven hills are the seven nations who have sought to destroy Israel. The antichrist is the seventh, but when he fakes his resurrection he also becomes the eighth.
- The ten horns are ten kings or rulers who will control the world for the antichrist.

But like John we should rejoice in the fact that Christ will overcome and the antichrist will be, "...going to his destruction."

LESSON 82

Revelation, chapter 17 verses 12-14

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 17 we learned that the term "Babylon" has multiple meanings during the Tribulation.

- First, the pagan religion fostered by the false-prophet and intended to bring the whole world together into one spiritual mind-set will be called Mystery Babylon, the Mother of Prostitutes. This vile title uses the word prostitute or harlot to characterize the sinful love for demonic ideology of the world's end-times pagan worship. This is further personified as a "...woman..." riding on the beast. This gives us a symbolic view of the end-times pagan religion being supported by the antichrist. But as we'll see now in chapter 17 the antichrist will eventually destroy the pagan religion and turn the world's spiritual focus on himself to be worshiped as a god.
- Second, The term Babylon is also used to describe the overarching empire of the antichrist. The government, economic and military power he will use to control the world under a single demonically inspired kingdom that appears will be segregated into ten regions or divisions.
- Third, as we will see in chapter 18 the term Babylon may also mean a city that scripture indicates will be the epicenter of the antichrist's controlling government and power. Scholars debate where the antichrist's "Babylon" headquarters will be. Some say Rome, others speculate somewhere in Europe, but it may very well be on the partially reconstructed site of the new city of Babylon, initially rebuilt in the 1980's by Saddam Hussein, and home of the Babylon Festival for International Culture. Recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, the complex is now abandoned due to the Iraqi war but it serves to show how quickly man could focus his attention on restoring his pagan past.
- But wherever they are, the empire, city and religion all take their names from the ancient and sinful pagan culture at Babel. A people of one language and focus who sought to place themselves above God (Genesis 11). When God scattered them across the world they took their pagan beliefs with them, but in the end, they will all come back to the "...mother..." of all demonic religions - Babylon - and when they do the entire Tribulation world will go into a demonically influenced religious frenzy.

Now, with that let's continue our study of chapter 17.

12. "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received their kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. 13. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. 14. They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

12. "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received their kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast."

In our last lesson we saw reference to seven kings (Revelation 17:10). These represent ancient kingdoms who through time have sought to destroy Israel. Six of them are in the past but the seventh is a future king (the antichrist) who comes to power and then becomes the eighth king

after he appears to die and is resurrected (Revelation 13:12-14). Now in verse 12 we see another description of the antichrist as having ten horns (refer to Revelation 13:1). These represent ten future kings. Many scholars believe they are ten provincial rulers and may indicate the world will be divided into ten regions or divisions, each ruled by a leader who reports to the antichrist. Verse 12 further states "...who have not yet received their kingdom,...", which indicates this is still in the future and has not yet occurred. John clarifies this by saying, "...but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast...". This simply means they will have authority for a short period of time and will serve the antichrist. This could be during the entire Tribulation, starting when the antichrist first comes on the scene (Revelation 6:1), but is certainly in the second half after the antichrist declares himself to be god and the whole world will worship him. (Revelation 13:8 / 16).

Some of these may be the same kings we saw in chapter 16 when demonic spirits will lure kings from the east and across the Euphrates River to gather for battle at Armageddon. (Revelation 16:13-16). We will see them again in chapter 18 when they lament the destruction of the antichrist's empire, and again in chapter 19 when they are destroyed by, "...the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh." (Revelation 18:3 and 9 / 19:21).

For further reference, Daniel had a similar vision when he interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) and described the ten kings as ten toes on a statute representing multiple ancient kingdoms. Of these he said, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom [Millennial Kingdom] that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever." (Daniel 2:44 / 2 Samuel 7:12-16). Later, in another interpretation of his own dream God gave Daniel even further clarity of the same end-times event. This time not only describing the ten future leaders, but describing the beast who was "...waging war against the holy people and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom (Millennial Kingdom]. Here Daniel describes the antichrist's future empire as, "The ten horns are ten kings who will come from his kingdom. After them another king will arise.... This "another" king is the antichrist who rises to power from within the future kingdoms of the world and sets himself up as the supreme leader. (Daniel 7:24). Both of these passages appear to point to the same events we're now discussing in Revelation.

13. "They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast."
These end-times kings will have only one focus, and that is to serve the antichrist as he moves to control the entire world and to rid the population of anyone who does not worship him." (Daniel 7:21 / Revelation 13:15).

14. "They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

14.a. - "They will wage war against the Lamb..."

In chapter 16 we saw that at the sixth Bowl the river Euphrates will be dried up by God, "...to prepare the way for the kings from the east..." (16:12). Then we saw demonic spirits - symbolized as slimy frogs - who will come from the mouths of satan, the antichrist and the false-prophet to deceive, "...the kings of the whole world, to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty." (16:14). "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (16:16). Now in chapter 17 we see the same kings on the battlefield and ready to fight God. They have come with the antichrist and false-prophet as their leaders, but they have grossly underestimated their opponent...

14.b. - "...but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings..."

The Lamb, of course, is Jesus. Seen here in His most royal and divine presence as He prepares to defeat the kings of the world and the antichrist. Typing all of this together, we are reminded that:

- He is the Living Redeemer, whom Job prophesied, "...in the end He will stand on the earth." (Job 19:25).
- He is the one whom John saw, "...and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion." (Revelation 14:1).
- He is the Great Reaper who, "...swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested." (Revelation 14:16).
- He is the Rider, "...called Faithful and True...", whose armies dressed in white follow Him as He will, "...strike down the nations..." "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has the name written: King of kings and Lord of lord." (Revelation 19:11/15-16).
- He is, "...the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." (Isaiah 66:15).
- He is the one who will, "...trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness." "A time when, "The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble." (Joel 3:13&16).

This describes our Lord Jesus at the battle of Armageddon. The next-to-last battle between Jesus and satan's armies. We will study this event in more detail when we get to chapter 19. There we will see the time when, "...I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army." (Revelation 19:19). A time when the antichrist and false-prophet will be thrown into hell and every one of their followers destroyed.

14.c. - "...and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

What a wonderful truth of God's word to wrap our heads around. As believers in Christ (adhering to the true gospel) we will return with Jesus when He defeats satan and the antichrist's armies. Chapter 19 verse 14 indicates this when it says, "The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." In several lessons we have studied the use of terms like "white", "linen" and "clean" to describe believers in Christ (for an example, see Revelation 3:5), but verse 14 makes it very clear that those returning with Jesus as His army include His, "...called, chosen and faithful followers." Peter reminds us several times that we have been "...called..." by the Lord to be faithful. (1 Peter 1:15 / 2:9 / 3:9 / 5:10). He also reminds us we are a "...chosen people, a royal priesthood..." (1 Peter 2:9). "Likewise, Jude reminds us that we, "...have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ." (Jude 1). Further,

the writer of Hebrews reminds us that we who are saved through our belief in the blood of Christ are "...those who are called...", to receive eternal life. (Hebrews 9:15).

Those cited here in verse 14 include us. The past, present and future believers who will return with Christ at His Second Coming when He destroys mankind and establishes His Millennial Kingdom where we will reign with Him. (Revelation 20:6 / 1 Corinthians 6:2 / 2 Timothy 2:12).

What a day that will be.

LESSON 83

Revelation, chapter 17 verses 15-18

Quick Recap:

In our last lesson we saw ten "kings" who scripture indicates will act as some type of regional or divisional rulers within the antichrist's kingdom. They will be loyal to the antichrist and will eventually follow him into battle to wage war against Christ on the Plains of Megiddo - the place we know as Armageddon. (Revelation 16:14 / 17:12). These will undoubtedly be mighty and powerful rulers who by that point in the Tribulation will have endured almost seven years of God's righteous judgment. They will live in a desolate land that is almost completely devoid of natural resources and they themselves will be covered in festering sores, tormented by super-heated blasting air from the sun, and living in a dark world with no natural light. (Revelation 16:2/8/10). Yet they will gather together, undoubtedly by the millions, to fight against the Lord. --- But their demise will come quickly and they will be defeated and totally annihilated by the returning Jesus in His role as the Holy Warrior Judge we will see in chapter 19. (Revelation. 17:13 / 19:19).

Now at the end of chapter 17 we see the destruction of the "...woman...", the personification of the spiritual Babylon. The pagan religion started by the false-prophet to capture the sinful hearts of Tribulation man. (Revelation 17:2-6). Surprisingly, at what seems to be the peak of her world-wide devotion, the religion will be obliterated by the antichrist so that man's attention will turn fully to the worship of him as their god. (Revelation 17:16-17). When this happens we see the term "...woman..." shifted in its meaning from a religious connotation to instead personify the capital of the antichrist's evil empire. (Revelation 17:18). At that point, the antichrist's role as the leader of a world-wide government, business and military conglomerate will also be as a religious leader in his role as a demonic god. (2 Thessalonians 2:4). A role he will not be allowed to maintain and he, his empire and everyone associated with him will be destroyed. Through all of this we are reminded that these actions are all coordinated and choreographed by God to achieve His divine purpose. (Revelation 17:17).

Now, with that let's conclude chapter 17.

15. "Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are the peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 16. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin, leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God's words are fulfilled. 18. The woman you saw is a great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

15. "Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are the peoples, multitudes, nations and languages."

In verses 1 and 2 one of the Bowl angels told John, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." These verses now combined with verse 15 help us better understand that the "...woman..." in verse 3 is the

"...prostitute..."; the pagan religion of the false-prophet. The "...waters... where she sits represents the whole world's sinful population; the "...peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.", who will all be focused on her as their source of worship. Verse 15 also provides another connection to the kings we saw in 16:12-16 and 17:12 who appear to be divisional leaders within the antichrist's empire and for a short time will control the world within their regions. Here we see the king's sin, the "...adultery..." they committed with the false religion through their sinful love and devotion to the demonic pagan system. We also see the whole world, who is, "...intoxicated...", or spiritually inebriated and falling-down drunk from their frenzied life of a sin-based pagan religion. This will be a time of spiritual depravity like the world has never seen before (Romans 1:28 / 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12), as "religion", in its most sinful pagan form will spiritually engulf the population and control their actions and thoughts. It will be even worse than it was in the time of Noah when mankind's sin grew to the point, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time..." (Genesis 6:5 / Matthew 24:37-38). Through this feverish and sin-laden religious fervor the false-prophet will bring the world together united into a single mindset that can be controlled and manipulated by the antichrist. He will do through sensationalism, with signs and wonders (Revelation 13:13), and through demonic spirits of deception. (Revelation 16:13).

But here at the end of chapter 17 something is about to change...

16. "The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin, leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire."

This is remarkable...the false-prophet with all of his signs and wonders will bring the world together into a single pagan religious focus. Everyone - with the exception of the defiant and hated Tribulation believers - will be a practitioner of this religion. The Bible doesn't say what the focus of the religion will be. Maybe they will worship a false god like those of modern buddhism or hinduism. Or maybe a new god of some type to draw the whole world into idolatry. Or maybe it will be the worship of material wealth and sin that rules their hearts. Or maybe they will be entranced by the signs and wonders performed by the false-prophet. But whatever the initial focus of their religion is, it will change abruptly at some point during the Tribulation. Most likely at the time when the antichrist enters the temple, declares himself to be god and sets-up an idol to himself. (Revelation 13:15-16 / Daniel 9:27 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4). It would make sense that after this declaration the antichrist would not want the world to worship anyone or anything but him.

But what is amazing is the force with which the antichrist and his ten world rulers will attack the religion they helped create. The Bible doesn't say, but this may indicate the antichrist will have a difficult time converting the world's population from the religion initiated by the false-prophet to the worship of him. They may resist or want to hold onto some vestige of the paganism they have practiced up to this point. But whatever the reason, it appears the antichrist attacks the religion with vengeance. Verse 15 says he "...hates..." her. He doesn't just disapprove of the belief system, but he hates it. Then as he begins to dismantle and discredit the religion he does so completely, leaving her naked (bare, and without support or cover), he will, "...eat her flesh..." (tear her apart and devour her), and, "...burn her with fire." (to ensure complete destruction so there is nothing left to worship). From this we can assume it will be a violent overthrow to ensure no one worships anyone or anything but him.

17. "For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God's words are fulfilled."

What a profound verse. From the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 3:15 all the way through Revelation we have been reminded over and over that all judgment is a divine and just act of God.

In Revelation we have seen many examples of this including:

- The first seven Seal judgments will be opened by the hand of Jesus. (Revelation 6:1).
- Jesus will give satan the keys to the Abyss to release millions of demons to torment man. (Revelation 9:1-3).
- He will release four demonic angels bound at the River Euphrates who would command an army of 200 million demons. (Revelation 9:14-15).
- He will enable Michael to throw satan to the earth filled with fury. (Revelation 12:9-12).
- He will reap the earth of all non-believers. (Revelation 14:15).
- He will enable the antichrist's kings to come to Armageddon for battle so they can be destroyed. (Revelation 16:12).
- He will rule with an iron scepter and "...treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." (Revelation 19:15).
- He will destroy the armies of Gog and Magog with fire from heaven. (Revelation 20:9).
- He will act as sole judge, jury and executioner at the Great White Throne Judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15).

God will initiate, orchestrate, coordinate, and execute every action of judgment from man's fall in the garden to satan's fall after the Millennial Kingdom. He will righteously and justly destroy satan's followers and every unrepentant man. Now in verse 17 God takes away all doubt about who is in charge of the destruction when he tells us that He, "...put it into their hearts...", to "...accomplish his purpose...", "...until God's words are fulfilled." This fulfillment will include all of the prophetic scripture in His entire word.

18. "The woman you saw is a great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Up to this point the term "...woman..." was used to personify the pagan religion of the false-prophet. (Revelation 17:3-6). But now with the destruction of the religion and the shift of man's worship to the antichrist, the term "...woman..." shifts to include the city from which the antichrist will rule as god. As we discussed earlier in chapter 17 there are several thoughts on where this city might be. Possibly in Rome, maybe somewhere else in Europe, or maybe at the site of a reconstructed Babylon. Some contend it is not a city at all but instead means the overall infrastructure behind the antichrist's government and economic empire. That may be true, but the Bible repeatedly uses the word "city" so I'm inclined to believe it may be a location that serves as the hub of the antichrist's operation. I believe we'll see this as we move into chapter 18 where we will see the antichrist's epicenter not only called a city but called Babylon (18:2 / 10 / 16 / 18 / 21). These verses seem to indicate the destruction of an actual place.

Scripture indicates the term "Babylon" in Revelation has three uses. In chapter 17 we saw the future destruction of Babylon as the term used to describe the future apostate and prostituted religion of the false-prophet. (Revelation 17:5) We also saw a detailed description of the infrastructure of the antichrist's world-wide empire which can also be called Babylon. (Revelation 14:8). Next in chapter 18 we will see the destruction of the antichrist's key city, also named Babylon. The end-times center of politics, commerce and greed. These various applications of

the name indicate the depth to which satan's influence will permeate the Tribulation world. Every aspect of their religion, government, military, economy, commerce and trade will be controlled by satan through the antichrist, and it will all revert back to the mindset of the people at Babel. Those who believed they could make their name and their kingdom stand above God.

As we close chapter 17 I think it bears mentioning that readers of Revelation in an earlier age may have had a difficult time understanding the level of wickedness and debauchery that will characterize the future world-wide religious flurry of Mother Babylon and the sinful lusts of the antichrist's Babylonian-like empire. Even John was astonished when he saw the vision of what is to come. (Revelation 17:6). But we, modern-day believers, can begin to see how this will happen. As we watch the world's focus grow more and more self-absorbed, materialistic and hedonistic, as we see the decline of moral consciousness and public acceptance of sinful practices that are in direct conflict with God's commands, while we observe both the panic and polarity over godless political platforms, and then as we witness the demonic influence of an apostate and ever popular prosperity-seeking church, we can easily see how the world can be pulled together to follow the false doctrine of a strong and charismatic leader. This is certainly troubling, but as believers in Christ Jesus we can stand tall and bold in the knowledge that our Lord and King will overcome all of this and reign supreme, and that in the end He will, "...roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble." (Joel 3:13 and 16).

Hallelujah!

LESSON 84

Revelation, chapter 18 verses 1-3

Quick Recap and Introduction to Chapter 18:

In chapter 16 we discussed each of the seven Bowl judgments. These will be the last of twenty-one horrific events God will use to destroy the last remnant of the unrepentant human race and prepare the earth for the returning Christ. These last seven judgments will probably occur at the very end of the seven-year Tribulation period and will be the most destructive of all.

Let's quickly review what the last seven Bowl judgments will do:

- The first Bowl will cover mankind with raw, festering sores. (Revelation 16:2).
- The second will turn the seas into a thick coagulated substance described as, "...blood like that of a dead person.". (Revelation 16:3).
- The third will do the same to the world's rivers and springs until there is no clean water left for man to drink or to wash their infected bodies. (Revelation 16:4).
- The fourth will increase the power of the sun until it sears and burns people with extreme heat and fire. (Revelation 16:8-9).
- The fifth will be poured out on the beast's throne; the seat of his evil empire, and the world will be plunged into total darkness. (Revelation 16:10).
- The sixth will dry-up the River Euphrates. An intentional act of God to make a way for armies from the east to be lured to Armageddon where they will be destroyed by Christ. (Revelation 16:12).
- And finally, the seventh Bowl, the last of the twenty-one judgments of God will be poured into the air. (Revelation 16:17). It will engulf the world, probably altering the atmosphere and bringing great catastrophic destruction. This will include an earthquake like none the earth has ever seen before. Guided by the hand of God it will be so powerful it will reshape the earth in preparation for Christ's coming Millennial Kingdom. In its wake, mountains will lay flat, Jerusalem will be split into three parts and the antichrist's empire will be destroyed. (Revelation 16:18-20). While this is happening hailstones of over one hundred pounds each will target man across the earth. (Revelation 16:21).
- And as the seventh Bowl is poured out on earth a loud voice from heaven's throne will proclaim, "IT IS DONE"! (Revelation 16:17).

Beginning with chapter 17 the narrative shifts back to give us more detail about the events that will occur during the seven Bowl judgments in chapter 16.

- Chapter 17 covers the destruction of the antichrist's pagan religion (Revelation 17:1),
- Chapter 18 provides details about the destruction of the antichrist's government and commercial empire (Revelation 18:2),
- Then chapter 19 describes the events that will occur at Christ's Second Coming. (Revelation 19:11).

All of these provide additional details to help us understand what is happening during the seven Bowl judgments of chapter 16.

As we saw, chapter 17 focuses primarily on the religious aspects of the antichrist's empire. The pagan belief system called, "Babylon The Great The Mother of Prostitutes And Of The Abominations Of The Earth". (Revelation 17:5). This will be a "religion" the false-prophet will use to unite the world's population into a single spiritual mindset. (Revelation 13::14-15 / 17:3-5). The system, personified as a "...woman...", is further defined as a prostitute who lures mankind into an intoxicated sinfulness as they feed on lust, luxuries and the blood of God's followers. (Revelation 17:6). Chapter 17 also provides both an historic and future look at satan's attempts to destroy Israel through ancient empires and highlights the antichrist's future empire as the seventh and eighth heads of the seven-headed beast. (Revelation 17:9-14). An empire that he along with ten regional kings will use to rule the world for a short period of time. (Revelation 17:12). But then the story takes an unexpected twist when we see the antichrist destroy the false religion he helped create so that the world's population will focus their worship solely on him. (Revelation 17:16).

Now in chapter 18 we will see even more detail about what will occur during the seven Bowl judgments, but here the focus shifts from "Babylon" as the religious arm of the empire, to "Babylon" as a city, the central hub of the antichrist's Babylonian-like kingdom. (Revelation 17:5 / 17:15 / 18:2). Rather than focusing on destruction of the religion we saw in chapter 17, chapter 18 will show us the destruction of the antichrist's government, military and economy. What we'll find interesting is the fact the economy and commerce can function at all. The events of chapter 18 will occur during the seven Bowl judgments, by which point both mankind and the earth itself will have endured almost seven years of punishing judgment. But somehow they will be able to keep some semblance of normality, even to the point of maintaining active commerce and international trade. This may be possible due to the level of greed and the power of sin that will exist at the end of the Tribulation. Greed that will drive them to function even under these conditions.

Keep in mind, everything we see occurring in chapters 17 and 18 will be happening during the Bowl judgments in chapter 16. Then near the end of the seven Bowls Jesus will return in chapter 19 to reclaim His creation.

Confused? That's ok. We'll clear it up as we move forward.

And with that let's dig into chapter 18.

1. "After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2. With a mighty voice he shouted; "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. 3. For the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

1.a. - "After this..."

This comment links the narrative of chapter 17 with chapter 18. After John saw the events associated with the fall of the antichrist's pagan religion he now sees into chapter 18 which will show the destruction of the antichrist's empire.

1.b. - "I saw another angel coming down from heaven..."

Here we see yet another angel sent to instruct John. The Greek word used here for "...another..." is "allos" or "allon" which means "another of the same kind." That indicates he is probably another one of the seven Bowl angels who had explained the fall of the Babylonian "...woman...". (Revelation 17:1). He is seen coming down from heaven. Sent by the Lord to speak with John.

1.c. - "He had great authority..."

In chapter 17 the seven Bowl angels were commanded by God to "Go, pour out the seven bowls on God's wrath on the earth." (Revelation 17:1). This was the command and authority given to them by God to carry-out His final seven judgments. This may be what John is referring to as having "...great authority...", because this angel is one of those select few who will be entrusted with this critical task.

1.d. - "...and the earth was illuminated by his splendor."

The fifth Bowl was poured out, "...on the throne of the beast, and the kingdom was plunged into darkness." (Revelation 16:10). As we discussed that Bowl poured judgment on the antichrist's seat of power; his government, rule, authority and sphere of influence in order to destroy the very fabric of his kingdom's infrastructure (as we will see now in chapter 18). At that point the world will be in spiritual and physical darkness with man desperately trying to find his way. Then this angel will appear, "...illuminated by his splendor...". This reminds me of the description of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, when, "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light." (Matthew 17:2), or the Psalmist's view of the Lord, "You are more radiant than light." (Psalms 76:4), and "The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment." (Psalms 104:2). And most beautifully, in describing Christ and the New Jerusalem, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (Revelation 21:23). The angel we see here comes from the throne room of God, bearing the commands of God and therefore reflects the glory of God. This is the splendor of righteousness illuminating the earth at a time when man and earth will be smothered in spiritual and physical darkness. And with this light John can clearly see what is happening.

2. "With a mighty voice he shouted; "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal."

2.a. - "With a mighty voice he shouted; "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!"

In chapter 14 we saw three proclaiming angels. The first spread the gospel of Jesus to the whole world. (Revelation 14:6). The third warned every individual on earth of the judgment to come. (Revelation 14:9). But the second will proclaim, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." (Revelation 14:8). This is the same announcement made in chapter 18 by one of the Bowl angels, and is an event that will happen during the seventh Bowl (Revelation 16:17-21). It is also an event prophesied by Isaiah, "Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie scattered on the ground." (Isaiah 21:9). This is the fall we now see. The destruction of the antichrist's pagan religion in chapter 17 (Mystery Babylon) and now the destruction of the antichrist's demonic empire in chapter 18 (Babylon the Great).

2.b. - "She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal."

This describes the wickedly demonic seat of power of the antichrist's dominion. It's hard for us to wrap our heads around what this will be like, which may be why God gave John so many descriptors in the text. So try to picture a city and an empire whose leaders are demon possessed, whose prime leader is satan himself, who is populated by millions of unredeemed and totally unrepentant blaspheming sinners, and where horrific sin is man's normal way of life. (Revelation 13:5-8). Here John describes its residents from several evil and detestable vantage points. It is a "haunt" - Greek "phylake" or "prison" - for every impure spirit. This may include the demons from the abyss (Revelation 9:2), the two hundred million demons who were released at the River Euphrates to kill a third of mankind (Revelation 9:16), the demons expelled from heaven by Michael (Revelation 12:7-9), and possibly the impure and deceiving spirits who led the kings of the east to Armageddon (Revelation 16:13). John then describes the creatures who will inhabit the city. Every unclean bird and detestable animal, "therion" in Greek, who are "wild and brutal". These may indicate real animals or may be symbolic of demonic beings resident in this place. Either way, it gives us the description of a place that is pure evil. A time when, "Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, and object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives." (Jeremiah 51:37). Interestingly John's list does not include humans. Possibly indicating his view may be after they were destroyed by God and all that is left is the demon world.

3. "For the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." Here John mentions the people absent from verses 2. In chapter 17 we talked about the kings and the rulers, who will join the antichrist in domination of the world., "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received their kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast." (Revelation 17:12). These are the kings who will rule ten divisions of the antichrist's empire. But the kings we see here may also be those who were lured across the Euphrates River to fight Christ at Armageddon. (Revelation 16:16), and the rulers of business and commerce "...the merchants...", who greedily continue to seek riches even during the Tribulation. Either way, they are seen here intoxicated with sin, using the term "...adulteries..." to reflect their allegiance to the Babylon empire of the antichrist and their hatred of God and to indicate the fallen nature of their sin.

Interestingly, they will grow, "...rich from her excessive luxuries." At a time when the world is in total chaos, the surface of the earth will be burned to a crisp, the seas and rivers will have turned to blood, cosmic bodies will have crashed into the earth, millions of people will have died from war, famine, pestilence and demon armies, and mankind will be covered in festering sores, business and commerce continues. It is almost impossible to grasp how man can maintain any semblance of life, particularly riches and luxuries under those conditions, but as we will see that is exactly what appears to happen. To me this is a clear indication of the extreme corruption and greed that will exist at that time.

LESSON 85

Revelation, chapter 18 verses 4-8

Quick Recap:

In our last lesson we started our study of chapter 18 where John describes more events that will occur during the seven Bowl judgments of chapter 16. Here the narrative shifts from the destruction of "Babylon" the end-times pagan religion in chapter 17 (Revelation 17:1-5), to the destruction of "Babylon" the city and empire of the antichrist. (Revelation 17:18 / 18:1-2). In the first three verses of chapter 18 one of the angels administering the Bowl judgments comes to John with such great authority and righteous splendor that he illuminates the darkened earth. (Revelation 18:1). He announces the fall of Babylon, the capital of the antichrist's evil infrastructure and the haunt of demons and detestable creatures. He also condemns the kings and rulers of the evil empire and the merchants who bask in her riches and luxuries. This indicates the level of wickedness and greed that will apparently exist during the Tribulation and will allow mankind to function in such a hostile environment.

But starting in verse 4 the narrative takes an unexpected turn. God calls to the wicked city for His people to come out. What does this mean and why will God's people be in such a sinful and inhospitable place? We don't know. But in an act of mercy God calls to His people to obey and flee before His final destruction comes.

Now let's dig deeper into chapter 18.

18. 4. -"Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; 5. for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. 6. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix for her a double portion from her own cup. 7. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' 8. Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her; death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

4. -"Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues...";

Let's look at a couple of other examples where a similar warning was given:

- Abraham's nephew Lot settled in the region of Sodom and Gomorrah. A place so sinful the Lord destroyed it with fire from heaven. But before He did God sent angels to warn Lot and ask him and his family to flee from Sodom before its destruction, "Get them out of here...", [they said to Lot], "...because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." They pleaded with Lot, who pleaded with his family to leave. When they hesitated the angels said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain!" (Genesis 19:12-13 / 17). Lot and his sinful daughters escaped, but his wife, lured by sin to gaze back upon the city, was destroyed. But what is unclear is why Lot was living in such a sinful place to begin with?

- Similarly, both Isaiah and Jeremiah warned Israel to, "Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians." (Isaiah 48:20). "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord's vengeance; he will repay her what she deserves."..."Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken." (Jeremiah 51:6-8). Although these warnings can be applied to the initial - but incomplete - destruction of Babylon in 539BC, it is also prophetic of the final and complete destruction of the antichrist's Babylon empire we now see in chapter 18.

But digging a little deeper we have the same question about the end-times believers as we had about Lot. Why will God's people be living in such a sinful and detestable place? Particularly at a time when God's followers will be hated by the antichrist and killed for not taking his mark. (Revelation 13:15). Although it's unclear why they will be there I share a few thoughts:

- Maybe they will hide-out deep in the city trying to avoid detection by the antichrist?
- Maybe they will have specific skills in business, commerce, government or military that make them a valuable commodity to the antichrist's empire? (Revelation 18:16).
- Maybe they will be slaves or prisoners? (Revelation 13:10 / 18:13).
- Maybe they are people who will not as yet have accepted Christ so God calls to them one last time?
- Maybe some of the Tribulation Saints will fall into temptation and become part of the sinful system? This may be indicated by a part of verse 4 that says, "...so that you will not share in her sin."

Whatever the reason, God calls to His people in Babylon to, "Come out of her.", just as He did with Lot and ancient Israel. It is a sign of God's mercy, for no matter why they are there and what they are doing, God calls to them to flee to Him for rescue and redemption. He doesn't do this for the general population, but only for "...my people...", so that they, "...will not receive any of her plagues...", and suffer through God's final judgments.

But doesn't God call to us to come out of the world even today?

- In speaking with the church at Corinth Paul reminded them of the words God spoke through Isaiah, "For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people. Therefore, Come out from among them and be separate.'" (2 Corinthians 6:16-17 / Paul paraphrasing Isaiah 52:11).
- Paul further stresses to the church at Ephesus, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them." (Ephesians 5:6-7).
- Paul also reminds us, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." (Romans 12:2).
- Jesus clarifies it is He who calls us out of the world, "As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." (John 15:19).
- And Peter states clearly how we are called out of the world by God, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9).
- Further, Peter prophetically speaks of God's end-times actions by reminding us, "...the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment." (2 Peter 2:9).

During the Tribulation God will call to His people who for whatever reason they find themselves in satan's lair. He will call to them and offer mercy if they will separate themselves from the world, come out and follow Him. But doesn't He do the same thing today? God calls to people all around us, convicting their hearts to turn to Christ. Then He gives us the opportunity to share His gospel so that His calls are heard. Therefore, go and be a voice so that those to whom He calls will hear, and those who seek will find Him.

5. "...for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes."

God does not hold a believers' sins against us. We see this in two key passages of scripture: "I, even I, and he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." (Isaiah 43:25). "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:34b).

This doesn't mean God "forgets" our sins. God is all-knowing and does not forget. This means He sets aside the sins of those that are covered by the blood of Christ, because, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9). This is not for anything we have done to blot out our own transgressions, but because of what Jesus did on the cross to take our sins on Himself. But the same cannot be said for those who are unrepentant and unredeemed. Their sins are not forgiven and will be punished by God. Jesus was clear about this when He said very simply, "I tell you. No! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:3). These are the sins God "...remembered..." in this verse. Sins that will be committed by those faithful to "...her...". The residents of the city and infrastructure of Babylon who worship the beast. (Revelation 13:8 / 17:18 / 18:2). This is yet another reminder that God's end-times judgment is just and righteous. A time when men will be so sinful and unrepentant they will blaspheme God to His face. (Revelation 16:11 / Romans 1:28). A time when their sins are so numerous and so wicked that God describes their number as, "...piled up to heaven...". This will be the point on God's eternal timetable when He is ready to clear creation of sin and create Christ's Millennial reign on earth for a thousand years as a precursor of creating His New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem for eternity. When that time comes no unredeemed sin will be allowed to enter the kingdom or his eternal creation. It will be a time when man will no longer seek God's forgiveness but God will remember her crimes.

6. "Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix for her a double portion from her own cup."

6.a. - "Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done."

By this point in the Tribulation the empire of the antichrist, "...she...", will be completely unrepentant and have no desire to ever turn to God. The outcome, as we clearly see over and over in prophecy is God's pronouncement, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." (Duet 32:35 / Romans 12:19). The Old Testament law of "...eye for eye, tooth for tooth..." (Leviticus 24:20) was intended for a balanced punishment, with the recompense equal to the crime. But here God will repay double. This will be the final judgment on the generation of Tribulation nonbelievers who will suffer the final and most horrific retribution of God. The intensity of His wrath is illustrated here as a "...double portion...", sufficient to punish the antichrist, his empire and his followers with the horrific judgments of the seven Bowls. As Jeremiah prophesied, "My eyes are on all their ways;

they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes. I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols." (Jeremiah. 16:17-18).

6.b. - "Mix for her a double portion from her own cup."

Her "...cup..." is a measure of her sin. This represents the composite sin of the antichrist's regime. The sins that, "...are piled up to heaven...". The sins the second proclaiming angel recognized as, "...the maddening wine of her adulteries." (Revelation 14:8). The sins one of the seven Bowl angels cited as driving the earth to be, "...intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." (Revelation 17:2). Sins that are from, "...a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries." (Revelation 17:4). In repaying the evil empire and her unrepentant population for their sin God will mix for them a "...double portion..." based on the sin and wickedness satan will have brought to the end-times world. This will be God's cup of wrath administered through the seven Bowls, "...the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath." (Revelation 14:10). The judgment applied when, "God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath," (Revelation 16:19).

7. "Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, "I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn."

7.a. - "Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself..."

Oddly, it appears Tribulation man will find a way to prosper materially even during this period of maximum turmoil. To the point that materialism may become a key spiritual focus. As we'll see later in chapter 18 mankind seems more concerned with the destruction of their riches than they do with their eternal punishment. Here is verse 7 the angel appeals to God to give the antichrist's empire as much "...torment and grief..." as they have given themselves their own sinful luxuries at the expense of others. Given the horrific judgments that will come through the seven Bowls the riches spoken of in this chapter must be extravagant.

7.b. - "...In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.'"

At the fall of the first city of Babylon Isaiah names her "Virgin Daughter of Babylon" because she had never been defeated before. She was also labeled as the "...queen city...", a moniker similar to what the second Babylon is called by John. But the first Babylon, bragging of her power was laid low by God for her sin, "Now then, listen, you lover of pleasure, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, "I am, and there is none beside me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children." Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day; loss of children and widowhood." (Isaiah 47:1,8-9). Now we see a similar boast of power from the end-times Babylonian empire. As with the first Babylon she declares she will not be a "...widow...". Asserting that her armies and leaders will not leave her unprotected and homeless. They boast they will never mourn. Such an odd comment at a time during the Tribulation when mourning must be a common reaction to the judgment happening around them. But again, this presupposes they will somehow assume they will survive and prosper.

8. Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her; death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."

Daniel 5:30 tells us the first Babylon fell in one day, "That very night Belshazzar, king of Babylon, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two." The end-times

Babylon appears to have the same fate, when the combination of the seven Bowls - the "...plagues...", including the great battle of Armageddon will cause the empire to collapse in a single day. As we have discussed, commentators differ on the definition of "The Day of the Lord". Some contend it includes the entire Tribulation period, some believe it is only the second half after the antichrist declares himself to be God, and others believe it speaks to the time of the seven Bowls. Frankly, in one sense they may all be right to a degree. The term "...day..." could mean a short period of time and could encompass any of these suggestions. But here in verse 8 it speaks to a day (as Daniel did) of the fall of the antichrist's empire. A day when God brings His judgments to a close. The day "...It Is Done!..." (Revelation 16:17). The day when Christ will, "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness! Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel." (Joel 3:13-16). Whatever time frame this event represents is not as critical as what the action itself means. This is the "...day..." when sin, for a time, is eradicated from the earth. The day when Christ will return to destroy who and what is left so that He may establish His Millennial Kingdom and a thousand-year earthly reign.

"Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near." (Zephaniah 1:7)

What a day that will be.

LESSON 86

Revelation, chapter 18 verses 9-10

Quick Recap:

In its entirety chapter 18 focuses on the total annihilation of the antichrist's empire. Specifically his future seat of power, a city named Babylon, that will be destroyed during the seven Bowl judgments in chapter 16 and by the return of Christ in chapter 19.

- In verses 1-3 an angel in glorious splendor will illuminate the darkened earth and proclaim the fall of Babylon. He will also condemn her rulers and the merchants, who even during this time of great judgment will find a way to grow rich, "...from her excessive luxuries."
- Verses 4-8 held an interesting twist. At the height of the antichrist's demonic rule God will call His people out from within the evil empire. It's unclear why they will be there in the first place, but it appears they are, so God's calling is a sign of great mercy. Just as He called Lot from Sodom and Israel from the earlier Babylon, God will call His future people to come out from the future Babylon just prior to its destruction.
- Now in the third part of chapter 18 we see three woes. These represent the reaction of the empire's evil leaders of its Government, Merchants and International Commerce -- as they lament the fall of the empire and the loss of their ill-gotten wealth. It is a sad commentary that reflects on man's greed for material desires and riches, even if it means they have to serve satan to get what they want. These woes express the last phase of the city's existence as the antichrist and his empire will be destroyed. But what is even more tragic in their reaction is their total lack of remorse. They mourn over their lost empire and riches but not once do they mourn for their lost souls or their eternal torment in hell. --- A clear sign of how evil man will be.

And with that background let's read the remainder of chapter 18 and unpack verses 9-10.

9. "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry" "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!" 11. The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore 12. cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; 13. cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves."

14. "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered. 15. The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified of her torment. They will weep and mourn 16. and cry out" "Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! 17.a. In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin! 17.b. Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. 18. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, "Was there ever a city like this great city? 19. They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich

through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! 20. Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you."

In this part of chapter 18 we see three groups of people:

The Kings: (verses 9-10)

- The "...kings of the earth..." -- this represents the rulers of the antichrist's empire, and probably includes:
- The "...kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand it.'" (Revelation 6:15-17).
- The "...ten kings..." who will rule the world with the antichrist. (Revelation 17:12).
- The "...kings from the East..." -- military leaders whose armies will be lured to Armageddon for destruction. (Revelation 16:12).
- The "...kings of the whole world..." -- Other rulers who will be gathered with those from the east. (Revelation 16:14-16).
- The "...kings of the earth..." -- those [who] repeatedly "...committed adultery..." with Babylon. (Revelation 17:2 / 18:3).

The Merchants: (verses 11-16)

- These will be the buyers and sellers fueling the antichrist's global economy. Manufacturers, distributors, dealers, salesmen, and "merchants" of every kind who prosper in a sinful commerce like the world has never seen before.

The Sea Captains: (verses 17-20)

I believe this may represent anyone and any industry involved in international commerce and trade. The term "...sea captain..." is used here to describe those who travel a distance to seek trade. Given the future timing of these events I believe it's safe to assume this will include commerce by sea, air cargo, road and rail transportation. And...maybe even internet buying and selling. These will be the people who move and transport the objects manufactured and sold by the "...merchants..."

It's also important to remind ourselves these people will be operating during the Tribulation as a willing partner of the antichrist. They will help establish a demonic global economy to support his global infrastructure and then bathe themselves in luxury while the world literally comes apart at the seams. They will be willing puppets in an empire of evil, and as such, they will be destroyed with her. The destruction we see here will come through all of the judgments, but more specifically through the events of the seven Bowl judgments in chapter 16, and from the powerhouse of divine force that will come when Jesus returns as the Warrior King in chapter 19.

9. "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her."

9.a. - "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning...",

By this point in verse 9 the city of the antichrist, the seat of his power and the source of their adulteress sin, will be suffering from divine destruction. The kings and rulers, who to this point will have supported the evil empire, will now, "...see the smoke of her burning...", and realize she is being destroyed. This will occur during the seven Bowl judgments and be part of the multifaceted destruction called "The Day of the Lord". An event prophesied many times the Bible, "See, the Lord is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute judgment on all people, and many will be those slain by the Lord." (Isaiah 66:15-16). "...Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire." (Malachi 4:1). And in the New Testament Peter spoke prophetically of this time when he said, "...the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly" (2 Peter 3:7), and John the Baptist alluded to this event when he said of Jesus, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:12).

9.b. - "...they will weep and mourn over her."

A deeper meaning of the terms weep and mourn is expressed clearly in the Greek. "Klausousin" to weep, and "kopsontai" to mourn, literally means to "Express uncontainable and audible grief", "A personal sense of personal and tragic loss", and "To cut at the heart". This is the level of remorse shown by the leaders of the antichrist's empire. They are broken beyond control, grieving loudly and mightily over their loss. They moan and groan as they survey the scene in front of them. Not for the loss of their souls, but the loss of their wicked city and the sinful pleasures it will provide them for a short time. As bad as man's sin has been in the past or is in the world today, I'm not sure if sin has ever existed anywhere as wicked and demonic as it will in the future Babylon.

10. "Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry" "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!"

10.a. - "Terrified at her torment..."

They will be "...Terrified..." - "Phobos" in Greek from where we get the word phobia. It means, "Alarm and abject fear", "To withdraw and flee to avoid dread". This level of fear and flight is obvious because it torments them; derived from the Greek word "basanismo" - which simply means to "Be tortured in agony." This is the reaction of the mighty leaders who have for a time ruled the world for satan. They have prospered from their illicit power and prestige, but now, covered in festering sores, in a darkened world, with the sun baking them alive, they are watching their evil home fall under the destruction of God. They are pitiful and weak and there is no fight left in them as they grieve over the loss of their demonic city.

10.b. - "...they will stand far off and cry..."

Earlier in chapter 18 the city boasted of her invincibility, "I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow; I will never mourn." (Revelation 18:7). But God knew otherwise and in response the angel proclaimed, "Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord who judges her." (Revelation 18:8). So here we see how this will come to pass. As their beloved city is being

destroyed by God her rulers and leaders will, "...stand far off...". They cower and shiver with terror and they do not fight back. They do not try to rescue her, and in fact, they abandon her and keep their distance as she quickly becomes a widow in her death.

10.C. - "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon!"

How pathetic mankind will be at this point. Certainly by now they will recognize their punishment comes from God (Revelation 6:15 / 16:10-11) yet rather than turn to the Lord they will curse His name as they cry "Woe! Woe", "Ouai, Ouai", an expression of great grief and sorrow. Even in her destruction they call her a "...great city...", and a "...mighty city...".

10.d. - "In one hour your doom has come!"

An "hour" in Greek, "Hora" can mean "A limited time to accomplish a specific purpose." In this case it may very well mean that God will destroy the city in a single 60 minute hour, but it may also represent a short period of time in which her destruction will occur. An example of this may be the words of Jesus just prior to His arrest. "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." (John 12:23 / 27 / 13:1). The glorification of Christ came through His death, burial, resurrection and exaltation, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. (John 17:1). The text does not mean all of those things will happen in just one hour, but signifies they will happen in a short predetermined span of time. This recognizes the timing of specific actions God will use to execute this destruction.

In our next lesson we will discuss the plight of the Merchants of Babylon.

LESSON 87

Revelation, chapter 18 verses 11-17a

Quick Recap:

Each segment of chapter 18 focuses on a specific view of the antichrist's future empire, its leaders and their destruction. In preparation for the fourth segment let's quickly review what we've learned in the first three:

- Verses 1-3 - An angel in glorious splendor will proclaim the fall of the future Babylon; the demonic seat of power of the antichrist.
- Verses 4-8 - Just prior to its destruction God will call His people to come out from the evil empire. It's difficult to understand why they will be there, but they will, so God's calling is a sign of great mercy. The same mercy He showed Lot at Sodom.
- Verses 9-10 - Shows us the first of three reactions from the city's inhabitants as the empire's evil leaders (the "kings") lament the fall of the empire and cry out. "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!"

Now in verses 11-17.a. we will see the lament and grief of the second of three evil groups of people who support the antichrist's empire. These are the "merchants", who during this time of great tribulation and judgment will find a way to create a world-wide economy and grow rich, "...from her excessive luxuries." But as with the "kings" they too will grieve as the source of their wealth implodes.

Now with that quick review let's break down verses 11-17a - the Merchants of evil.

11. "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore 12. cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; 13. cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves." 14. "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered. 15. The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified of her torment. They will weep and mourn 16. and cry out' "Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! 17a. In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

11. "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore..."

11.a. - "The merchants of the earth..."

The term "merchants" probably represents anyone, no matter how small or large their enterprise, who will manage the antichrist's economic engine. This is the second group of those who will support the antichrist's kingdom. The first group were the "kings", who will cower at a distance and lament over the fall of their evil city and its empire. Now we see the "merchants". Those who will fuel the one-world economy and infrastructure of the antichrist's Babylon. These will be the

buyers and sellers in a system of evil commerce focused on luxury and wealth at the expense of others. They will exist, and for a short period will prosper, at a time when only the most sinful greed could result in successful business dealings during such severe judgment.

11.b. - "...will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore..."

As we have discussed the Greek root of the terms "weep" and "mourn" reflect a deep and almost uncontainable grief. Also like the "kings" in verse 10 the "merchants" do not cry-out for their own souls or for the eternity that awaits them in hell. Instead, they grieve over the destruction of the evil city and its people; the source of their ill-gotten wealth. Why? Because once the city and her inhabitants are destroyed there will be no one left who, "...buys their cargoes anymore...". This is greed and material lust at its most extreme.

12. and 13. - 12. "...cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble...;" 13. "...cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves."

Verses 12 and 13 are basically one streaming list of items important to the merchants as the source of their wealth. The two lists are very similar but there is a slight difference that merits mentioning:

- Verse 12 catalogs items that are more industrial in nature. Items that require mining or manufacturing to produce a product from raw materials. This indicates there will probably be factories, mills and craftsmen, and other infrastructure required to support those involved in the creation of items made from wood, bronze, iron, minerals and precious stones. We will see the human element mentioned later in chapter 18 when the angel describes the complete destruction of Babylon and its inhabitants., "No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again." (Revelation 18:22). We should also note the term "...costly...", indicating many of these are items of luxury. They are the types of items that feed greed, not families. They are the items required by those worshiping the material wealth of the antichrist's kingdom to fuel their material passion as they grow wealthy off the backs of others.

Another thought. Given the characteristics of the antichrist's empire I don't picture ideal working conditions associated with the manufacture of these items during the Tribulation. In a time characterized by absolute sin and greed it is probably safe to assume workers and tradesmen will be subjected to punishing conditions. On top of that, the world will be in a constant state of destruction during this time making it extremely difficult to carry-on normal operations.

- Verse 13 is similar but includes items that are more related to agriculture than manufacturing. Crops will be grown, harvested and processed, and livestock will be raised. Although some of these items may be available for consumption by the general population, others are a luxury in themselves. Keep in mind, we know from Revelation 6:6 there will be a great famine across the earth. A time when the cost of even the most basic food items will be almost unaffordable, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and wine!" This will be a time of great starvation for most of the world with food being difficult to obtain. This may result in many of the items listed here being reserved for those lusting after material wealth an effort to become the elite of the antichrist's society.

So, let's break-out the "...cargoes..." listed here to better understand the types of things their greed is focused on. We'll pay particular attention to the effort required to obtain the raw material and manufacture the products to get a sense of the role the population will play to produce these items during the Tribulation. This will give us a sense of the empire's infrastructure and how it will function:

12. - "...cargoes of...":

- Gold, silver - These are categorized today as "precious metals" and may represent any other type of valuable metals commodity. Mining is required to extract the ore that must then be processed to produce a final product. This will require mines, mining equipment, smelting plants, and other facilities and skills to turn the raw product into sell-able commodities. Much human labor will be required.
- Precious stones and pearls - Similar to precious metals, these stones will be the jewelry and adornment of the sinful Tribulation inhabitants. Stones of course, are mined from the earth and pearls are gathered from the sea. As with precious metals, these commodities will also require human labor to extract the raw materials and convert them to a final product, including ocean fisheries to gather the pearls. When I think of the effort required to gather precious stones I'm reminded of the diamond mines in Africa. Mines with extremely poor working conditions today, which I suspect will be much worse during the Tribulation.
- Fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth –

You'll note, these are not common materials used to make everyday clothes for the general population. Instead we have "...fine linen..." and "...silk...", indicating luxury. We also see cloth that is "...purple...", and "...scarlet...", colors long associated with wealth and royal garments. The process for making purple dye is significant and in ancient times involved extracting a secretion from tens-of-thousand of a specific species of marine snails. It was described by several names including, royal purple, imperial purple or imperial dye, all indicating its high cost. It was highly prized by the Romans who used it for ceremonial robes. This is the color of cloth Lydia from Thyatira sold; "...a dealer in purple cloth..." who helped Paul in his ministry. (Acts 16:14). We also see mention of this in Proverbs 31 - "The Wife of Noble Character" - who was "...clothed in fine linen and purple..." (Proverbs 31:22). And sadly, it was the color of the robe the Roman soldiers placed on the bruised and scared body of Jesus as they beat Him, mocked Him and led Him to be crucified, "They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him." (Mark 15:17-19). I emphasize the historic use of this color to represent royalty to help us understand why it will be so important to the greed-driven leaders of the antichrist's empire.

- Every sort of citron wood, - The English word for this type of wood is "Thyine" derived from the Greek "thuon" which means "fragrant". The Roman's called it "Citrus Wood"; a very rare and valuable wood imported from North Africa and Spain and used to make expensive furniture for the Romans and Greeks. Although citron wood is specifically mentioned it could also indicate other types of aromatic woods.
- Articles of:
 - Every kind made of ivory,
 - Costly wood,
 - Bronze, iron, marble

All of these items are made of raw materials that require great effort to cut or quarry and then skilled craftsmen to turn them into usable objects. Ivory requires hunting or domestication of elephants or narwhals, and is very difficult to obtain. Currently ivory is generally considered an illicit trade dealt mainly on the international black market. "Costly" wood appears to be more than standard pine or other common building materials and could represent many other types of fine and expensive woods like walnut, mahogany, ebony or cherry. These require harvesting forests and then factories and mills for manufacturing. Likewise, bronze, iron and marble require significant labor in quarries and mines and then specialized trades are required to turn the raw ore or stone into a usable commodity. As with the other items like ivory and costly wood, bronze and marble are generally considered items of luxury and not common with the general public.

Keep in mind, all of these items that require harvesting forests, smelting ore, mining stones and fishing the sea will at some point be significantly disrupted by the judgment actions of God. The early Seal judgments will bring war and famine (Revelation 6:3-6), the first Trumpet judgment will destroy a third of the earth's trees (Revelation 8:7) and the second and third Trumpets will turn a third of the sea and fresh water to blood. (Revelation 8:8-11). All of these events, plus the remainder of the Seal and Trumpet judgments will make it exceedingly difficult to maintain the effort required to gather and process these items of luxury. But man's greed at that point will probably be more sinful than anything we can imagine and will fuel their passionate desire to grow "...rich from her excessive luxuries." (Revelation 18:3) that will drive their inexhaustible greed. (Revelation 18:3).

13. - "...cargoes of...",

Here the commodities shift from those requiring heavy manufacturing effort to those that are more agrarian:

- Cinnamon and spice - For centuries man has engaged in the spice trade. Some of the earliest explorers to the Far East went there for the express purpose of establishing trade routes to India, China and other areas to procure spices. The Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, Persians and later nearly every European and Middle Eastern country exploited the spice trade. This led to organized land and sea routes being established to support the trade of hundreds of commodities from the East. Common among these imports was cinnamon. A spice obtained from tree bark. Trade in cinnamon between Egypt and China is believed to have occurred as early as 2000 BC. It also bears mentioning in this context that cinnamon was highly prized by several ancient cultures as gifts for royalty and even as an offering to their gods. Undoubtedly, the inclusion of cinnamon and spices indicate the future existence of global trade routes across the antichrist's empire. We will see this more clearly in the last portion of chapter 18.
- Incense - Like spices, incense usually involves complex trade routes and has been a valuable commodity for thousands of years. Although it can be used for a number of applications incense is most often thought of in the ancient world as an offering for religious ceremonies. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Romans, Greeks and others used incense in their ceremonies, but so did the ancient Israelites.

For example:

- "Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense." (Exodus 30:1)
- "Place the gold altar of incense in front of the ark of the covenant law and put the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle." (Exodus 40:5)

- Also, in Revelation we have seen the use of incense as an offering to God, but here we see how the term represents the prayers of the faithful:
- "Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people." (Revelation 5:8)
- "The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angels hand." (Revelation 8:4).
- Myrrh and frankincense - These ointments are best known as a gift to Jesus from the Magi - a gift fit for a King, "Then they opened their treasures and presented him the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." (Matthew 2:11). Like spices and incense, both myrrh and frankincense require significant labor to gather and process the raw materials. They are extracted from resin excreted by the Torchwood tree and various other bushes of the Burseraceae family found in Africa, Asia and Central / South America. Since ancient times they have been used for medicine, incense or perfume, but was also commonly used for pagan religious rites. In terms of value, a single high grade nugget of myrrh today is worth over \$430 - nearly the price of gold. We see these items mentioned many times in the Bible including:
 - "Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh (Genesis 37:25)
 - "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take the following fine spices: 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is 250 shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant calamus, 500 shekels of cassia - all according to the sanctuary shekel - and a hin of olive oil. Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer." (Exodus 30:23-25)
 - "They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the "place of the skull"). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it." (Mark 15:22-23)
- Wine and olive oil - In John's discussion of the Seal judgments related to famine he specifically mentions wine and olive oil, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and wine!" Some believe these two items are pointed out because they are basic cooking items in ancient cultures. But their mention in the context of a famine, and specifically the warning to protect these products, may indicate they are luxury items reserved for the end-times wealthy. Either way, they are listed as representative of these and similar items critical to the antichrist's economy and traded by her merchants.
- Fine flour and wheat - These are basic food-stuffs. In the ancient Middle East wheat was one of the most common crops and flour was one of the stable products needed for cooking and for bread. Many times the Bible speaks of wheat, flour, harvest and threshing floors related to these commodities. As with other items on this list they are probably representative of any type of item considered in the basic food groups necessary to feed the population. But again, we need to go back to Revelation 6:6 to understand that even these basic food products will see extreme price escalation that will make them nearly unaffordable.
- Cattle and sheep - Indicate livestock will still be domesticated and used for food. That's interesting since the Tribulation period will see great famine as we've discussed earlier and the destruction of the grasses vital to livestock production. But as with the other commodities these may be reserved for the ruling class of the antichrist's kingdom. Particularly since a worker will have to pay a day's wages for just two pounds of wheat. Meat will be unaffordable.
- Horses and carriages - We've often talked about how Revelation uses imagery that can be understood by nearly every culture in every century. That is true of many items cited in this list, but I think "...horses..." illustrates that the best. For thousands of years horses have been

used as work animals, for recreation and for transportation, as they still are in some parts of the world today. The use of the word "...horse..." is recognized by most cultures who will quickly understand what they are used for. But here, in a future use, the word may also represent any type of vehicle or piece of equipment, which ironically, even today are still measured by "horsepower". Also, the word "...carriages...", "rhedon" in Greek can be translated as "chariots" or can mean any four-wheeled vehicle. As with the term "...horses..." I think we can assume a future view of this term could represent any form of personal transportation including vehicles used for pleasure, transportation or commerce.

- And human beings sold as slaves. - This may have multiple meanings. Certainly the hyper-sinful nature of the antichrist's empire will have no problem buying and selling humans as commodities. These may be those who go into captivity in Revelation 13:10, or possibly it could be other Tribulation believers who we know will be enemies of the antichrist (Revelation 13:8), or it may very well be a revived world-wide slave trade. Either way, this represents the most evil commodity of all - the trafficking of human beings. This may be where much of the labor will come from to work the raw products listed above into luxury items. In any case, just the thought of a system of world-wide slave trade helps us understand the deplorable social conditions that will be seen during the Tribulation. Even more shocking is the fact the future trade in slaves is not hidden but is actually mentioned here as one of their prized "...cargoes...", which in their sinful environment will undoubtedly be accepted by the world.

There may also be another meaning of "...slave...". This same verse in the KJV adds after "...slaves..." the words "...and souls of men...". Souls is from the Greek word "psychas", which can be interpreted figuratively as, "the breath of life." I think this reminds us of the tragic and physical consequence of slavery and human trafficking, but it could also point to the spiritual enslavement of the empire's population whose lives and faith will be focused on the worship of the antichrist and their own greed. In this sense nearly the entire population will be those of whom Jesus speaks of as, "...everyone who sins is a slave..." (John 8:34). So whether this speaks to physical slaves (which is highly probable) or the enslavement of man's soul, they will all be incarcerated by the empire of satan.

So why are we spending so much time talking through these lists in so much detail? Frankly, for the same reason God gave the long list to John in the first place. To help us get our head around the sinful mind-set and culture of the Tribulation world and their level of greed and materialistic passions. This will be a time when the world will be under systematic destruction by God but the satan-fueled government, military, economy and religion of the antichrist will still be driven by their extreme material lusts. Lusts so strong that even as their sinful city and empire are being destroyed, all they can mourn and wail about is the loss of their riches and luxury.

This list also leads me to another thought. What will happen to the assets of those raptured before the Tribulation, and of those who are martyred by the antichrist? There will undoubtedly be billions of dollars' worth of homes, land, belongings, savings and investments the prior owners will no longer care about (because by then we will all be with Jesus). I think we may have seen an indication of this type of evil-man's greed during WWII, as Hitler systematically emptied the Jewish communities across Europe and ordered the death of each person and the confiscation of every item belonging to them. Even their gold teeth were extracted. These items - many of great historic and monetary value - were sold in the streets to their German neighbors, taken by government leaders or hoarded for future use in museums or private collections. Even today,

seventy-five years later, Jewish families are still trying to recover their pirated items. I suspect the same will be true in the Tribulation. Neighbors will see no problem looting the houses or businesses of their Christian neighbors who literally disappeared, banks will foreclose on property that no longer has an owner, and valuables of every description will be hoarded for future use and for their material value.

I also find it interesting that many of the same items prized by the Tribulation sinners were used in the Old Testament to bring offerings to God for the tabernacle, "The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; rams skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; accacia wood, olive oil for light; spices for anointing oil and for fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breast piece. Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." (Exodus 25:1-8) --- So tragic that items once dedicated to the glory of God and His temple will one day be relegated to the glory of man and his demonic city.

There is even another possible and interesting connection that merits further study. Ezekiel 26-28 describes the lament over the destruction of the city of Tyre. One of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, Tyre is in modern-day Lebanon. An important Phoenician port city focused on international trade and commerce, it was also known for its pagan religions. Ironically, it is believed to be the city where the production of purple dye was perfected - one of the luxury items mentioned in the merchant's list. The kingdom was once allies with Israel and helped kings David and Solomon (2 Samuel 5:11 / 1 Kings 5:1-12), but they later sold Jews into slavery (Joel 3:4-8 / Amos 1:9-10), which resulted in God's judgment over the city by many nations. (Ezekiel 26:3). Initially destroyed in 573 BC by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar, its survivors escaped to a fortified island off the coast where they would eventually be routed-out by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. Prophetically, the story of their destruction aligns with the end-times prophecy of judgment on the antichrist's empire, "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness." (Joel 3:13).

Chapters 26-28 in the book of Ezekiel tells the story of Tyre's destruction. It symbolizes Tyre as a great trade ship being destroyed on a sea voyage. In the narrative God says of Tyre, they are, "...situated at the gateway of the sea, merchant of people on many coasts." (Ezekiel 27:3). He then goes to list the items the "ship" is made of -- the trade items of the merchant city -- fine woods, ivory, embroidered linen, awnings of blue and purple, silver, iron, bronze, chariots, horses, ebony, turquoise, rubies, wine, oil, spices, precious stones and gold. (taken from Ezekiel 27:6-22). Chapter 27 further says that during the city's destruction her people will cry out, abandon her, wail bitterly, sprinkle dust on their heads, roll in ashes, and weep in anguish with bitter morning. (taken from Ezekiel 27:28-33). Chapter 28 then provides a prophecy against the king of Tyre. A narrative some commentators also believe represents satan, his perfection, his fall and his final destruction. It speaks of the king's wisdom and understanding, his perfection and beauty, and speaks of him being in Eden. But then it describes the king's fall, his wickedness, violence and sin, and then it describes God driving him away in disgrace. We see this in verse 18 which is very similar to what we see in Revelation 18, "By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I have made fire come out from you, and it consumed you,

and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more." (Ezekiel 28:18-19). Certainly these verses could apply literally to the king of Tyre, but it may also point to satan and the prophecy of his destruction, the antichrist and his end-times merchants.

14. "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.'"

As we saw with the kings listed earlier, the focus of the merchants is not on their friends, or neighbors, or even on their own soul and eternity. Instead, the "...fruit...", or outcome they "...longed for..." is the "...luxury and splendor..." they will crave even as they watch it vanish. Interestingly, they will recognize its destruction is complete and will, "...never be recovered."

15. "The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified of her torment. They will weep and mourn..."

Again, as with the kings, the merchants will cower and stand far off at a distance. They will have abandoned their beloved city of sin, leaving her a widow and doing nothing to defend her. This is a clear reminder of the pathetic state of mankind in the Tribulation when all that matters is their own wealth and riches.

16. "...and cry out" "Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!"

This describes their self-centered grief, as the merchant's lament the tangible articles they have lost. The luxury items cited in their lists that brought them sinful joy and fed their greed.

17. "In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

What took seven years to build will be totally destroyed in a very short period of time. Not only will their city be "...brought to ruin...", but so will its residents and their wicked belongings.

This describes the second of three segments of the Tribulation population and clearly shows us the sinful and wicked attitude of the people who will exist at that time. Unfortunately their grief is not focused on their own souls, but on the luxuries and riches that will rule their lives. I pray that those who lead or attend churches who support a Prosperity Gospel platform will read this chapter and understand how their doctrine is leading people into hell.

So sad.

LESSON 88

The conclusion of chapter 18.

Verses 17b-24

Quick Recap:

As we've now seen, chapters 17 and 18 are very important because they help us see the culture and psychology of the people who will live during the Tribulation period. This will be the time when the antichrist will rule the world, and it is his constituents who will witness the final judgments of God. Observing their behaviors also helps us understand how even today the world is falling into a pattern of sin and toleration that reflects a culture comfortable with behaviors that are against God's commands.

The story of man's final failure is told through two "Babylons":

- Chapter 17 - The first "Babylon" will be a world-wide pagan religion established by the false-prophet to bring the population into a single spiritual mindset. A religion so wicked and demonic it is called "The Mother of all Prostitutes" (Revelation 17:5), and is personified as a sinful woman who will be, "...drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 17:6). But at some point, the antichrist will realize the power the religion has over the minds of the people and in a fit of jealous rage will violently overthrow the religion in order to refocus the world's spiritual attention on him as their god. (Revelation 17:16-17).
- Chapter 18 - The second "Babylon" represents the civil infrastructure of the antichrist's demonic empire. The world-wide government and economy are seen here as a city (Revelation 17:18), and gives us a glimpse of the materialistic lusts of Tribulation man; lust so powerful that riches and luxury will be the primary focus of their lives. We see this clearly through the reaction of three key elements of the empire's population:
- The "kings", who will function under the antichrist as puppet rulers of his one-world Babylonian-like empire.
- The "merchants", who will become rich on her luxuries and sin by selling everything from gold to human beings.
- The "sea captains", who will enable the illicit merchant's trade by transporting their goods across the sinful world.

Chapter 18 describes how each of these groups will react when they realize the empire of the antichrist is being destroyed by God. They will cower in fear but will not repent or seek God's grace. They will not even lament over their own lost souls or their future in hell. Instead they will pathetically wail and mourn over their earthly treasures destroyed with the city.

Keep in mind, the culture and mindset of Tribulation man we see in chapters 17 and 18 is what the world will be like when God releases the seven Bowl judgments. In many ways it is reflective of the materialistic culture we see in the world today. Although we don't know the timing of the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation, current world events, specifically those surrounding Israel, certainly make it possible the Tribulation, and the reactions we see in these chapters, could be very near. At least nearer than they have ever been before.

The reaction of the people we see in these chapters, their lust after material wealth, their worship of an apostate religion, and particularly their blasphemy against God, helps us understand why God's horrific judgments are righteous and just. All of this sets the stage for the glorious return of Jesus Christ, who at the end of the Bowl judgments, will return as the Righteous Judge to destroy satan's puppets, the antichrist and the false-prophet, but also to destroy the blasphemous remnant of mankind.

But then chapter 18 shifts to a more encouraging note from a believer's perspective. Beginning in verse 20 we see a celebration of Babylon's defeat, and a description of her fall that will be enabled by the much-awaited return of our Lord and Savior as the Holy Warrior King (we will study this in chapter 19).

Now with that context let's conclude our study of chapter 18 verses 17b to 24.

17.b. - "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. 18. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, "Was there ever a city like this great city? 19. They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! 20. Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you. 21. "Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. 22. The music of harpist and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. 23. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of the bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's important people. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. 24. In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth."

17.b. - "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off."

The pattern of sinful grief in verses 17b through 19 is basically the same reaction we saw from the "kings" and "merchants". Let's look back a few verses to see the comparison:

- 9. "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry" "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!".
- 15. "The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn 16. and cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! 17a. In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!".

Immediately after discussing the grief-stricken kings and merchants John now describes the third group, symbolized here as sea captains, sailors and all who earn their living on the sea. These probably represent the various industries, their leaders and workers who will transport the illicit

cargoes of the merchants across the world. There is an interesting connection between these seafarers associated with the destruction of Babylon and the story of God's judgment on the ancient city of Tyre. You'll recall Tyre was a wealthy trade city on the Mediterranean coast destroyed by God for their poor treatment of the Jewish people. A principal center of international commerce, Ezekiel describes the city of Tyre as a great trade ship, laden with precious treasures who is destroyed at sea. The "...sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea..." probably represents the industries who transport the goods manufactured and sold by the merchants. Similar to the list of goods in Ezekiel 27 these are illicit products ranging from gold to slaves that contribute to the sinful wealth and riches of Tribulation man. Given that, I think it's safe consider the "...sea captain..." and their crews in chapter 18 to represent anyone involved in domestic or international trade. This will include sea transport, but given its future view, could also include air cargo, rail, trucks or any other conveyance used to move products across regions. Namely, anyone who fuels the antichrist's one-world economy through their transport services. Also like the kings and the merchants, the sea captains, "...will stand far off." Unwilling to defend their city as they grieve at a distance over her material destruction.

18. "When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, "Was there ever a city like this great city?"

So it seems, the destruction of Tyre - seen by Ezekiel as a ship - is prophetic of the destruction of Babylon - seen here through the examples a sea captain and his crew.

God said of Tyre, "...I have made fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching..." "...you have come to a horrible end and will be no more." (Ezekiel 28:18-19). Now in chapter 18 the sea captains and other transporters of sin see Babylon much the same way. Yet their sin goes unconfessed as they still proclaim her to be a "...great city...". They make no mention of the city's population, their family, friends, the believers they killed, the slaves they sold, or even the antichrist they worshiped. They will focus entirely on their lost wealth; the cargoes of riches they transported for others. There is no humanity in the reactions of the kings, merchants or the sea captain's only sin.

19. "They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!"

Like verses 18 and 19, this verse is an echo of what was already said by the cowardly kings and the wicked merchants, but now the wail comes from the pathetic sea traders who like the others will quickly lose their source of wealth. (Revelation 18:10 and 16). They, "...throw dust on their heads...", an ancient act associated with great grief. (Joshua 7:6 / Job 2:12 / Lamentations 2:10). They will wail and woe over the wicked source of their income. They will care only for themselves and are so wicked they will not even cry over their own lost souls. Instead they grieve over the material fortunes they have lost. These will be the people of whom Jesus spoke who will, "...gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul..." (Matthew 16:26). These will be the extension of current day followers of a "Prosperity Gospel" doctrine who base their faith on the riches of this life instead of glory in the next. These are the people who failed to, "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." (Colossians 3:2).

20. "Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you."

At this point in chapter 18 the narrative changes tone. Instead of focusing on the reaction of man to the destruction of the antichrist's religion and empire we see celebration. Instead of hearing the wail and moan of sinful man we hear the joy in heaven over the final destruction of sin. Here the angel declares to the host of heaven, "Rejoice over her...", he proclaims, speaking of the destruction of Babylon - both the religion and the empire. His requested chorus of joyful revelers includes, "...you people of God!..." (all believers), and the "...apostles and prophets..."; which includes all followers of God throughout time. He proclaims finality and excitement, "For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you." This is the vengeance that is God's (Deuteronomy. 32:35). This is vengeance of the type prophesied by Nahum, "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and vents his anger against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished."..."Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him." (Nahum 1:1-2 and 6). In the end God will judge mankind for their sin, but also because of the, "...judgment she imposed on you.."; the persecution of God's people. (Revelation 6:9 / 7:9-10 / 13:10 / 13:15 / 20:4).

21. "Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again."

Here the "...boulder..." and "...large millstone..." are symbolic of items the reader will recognize as heavy and damaging. It being thrown into the sea helps us picture the violent destruction of Babylon -- like a large stone thrown into the water with a crash and then emits from its center rings of waves that spread out in all directions to engulf everything in its path. The prophet Jeremiah foretold of a day when, "...the Lord will destroy this place, so that neither people nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever. When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw in into the Euphrates. Then say, "So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring on her. And her people will fall." (Jeremiah 51:61-64).

22. "The music of harpist and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again."

23 "The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of the bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's important people. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray."

Then in verses 22-23 the angel provides a list of human activities that will no longer exist once the antichrist's empire and her subjects are destroyed. Not only will the empire and its infrastructure be destroyed, but all of the unrepentant and blaspheming people as well.

This list by no means covers all of the things that will be destroyed by God but it serves to highlight the destruction of activities we often associate with a thriving society:

- 22.a. - "The music of harpist and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again...", -- The performers, listeners, revelers, and those who entertained the empire of sin will be destroyed. "The joyful timbrels are stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the harp is silent." (Isaiah 24:8). The sinful sounds and chorus of Tribulation man will be replaced by the songs of the delivered and redeemed. (Revelation 15:2-4).

- 22.b. - "...No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again...", -- The craftsmen, laborers, salesmen and business leaders who fueled the empire's economy will be destroyed, and their efforts will be replaced by those who serve God. (Revelation 22:3-4).
- 22.c. - "The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again...", -- The factories, mills, and centers of industry required to process goods that make products and food will be eliminated, and will no longer be needed again, but will be replaced by the bounty of heaven. (Revelation 22:2-3).
- 23.a. - "The light of a lamp will never shine in you again....", -- Recall from the fifth Bowl judgment (Revelation 16:10) the world will be, "...plunged into darkness." There will be no light, no power, no escape from total darkness. But that will change for the believers because God's recreated city "...does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (Revelation 21:23).
- 23.b. - "The voice of the bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again...", The "...voices of the bridegroom and bride..." are associated with joy and love; an indication of normalcy even in their sinful society. But these sounds will be heard no more. Instead, God's judgment will "...bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of the bride and bridegroom in this place." (Jeremiah 16:9). But this will be replaced by the Bride of Christ, the church of true redeemed believers, "...his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteousness of God's holy people." (Revelation 19:7-9).
- 23.c. - "Your merchants were the world's important people...", It was the "merchants" who brought prosperity to the empire through their lust-driven trade. The same was said of Tyre, a predecessor of Babylonian prophecy, whose merchants were called, "...the bestowers of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traders are renowned on the earth. The Lord Almighty planned it, to bring down her pride in all her splendor and to humble all who are renowned in the earth." (Isaiah 23:8-9).
- 23.d. - "By your magic spell all the nations were led astray." -- The nations of the world, "...every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast -- all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world", will be "...filled with wonder...", by "...great signs...", of the false-prophet so that, "...it deceived the inhabitants of the earth..." (From Revelation 13:7-8 / 13-14). It is these who "...will perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." (2 Thessalonians 2:10). These are the people of the Tribulation who will be destroyed when Jesus comes with, "...a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations." (Revelation 19:15).

Jeremiah brings all of this together as he prophetically proclaims God's promise of their divine destruction, "I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of the bride and groom, the sound of the millstone and the lamp of light." (Jeremiah 25:9-10).

24. "In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth."

The label "...her..." can represent both the Babylon religion and the Babylon empire of the antichrist, but given the inclusive list of her victims it may also speak of all persecution of God's faithful followers - the "...prophets and of God's holy people and all who have been slaughtered on the earth." This probably speaks to martyrs throughout time rather than just those who die

during the Tribulation. (Revelation 6:10 / 11:7 / 13:7 / 17:6). But whoever is or is not included in this list, God will avenge their death by destroying both Babylons; the failed religion of the false-prophet - Babylon the prostitute - and the antichrist's demonic empire - Babylon "...the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.", and all of the people faithful to her. (Revelation 17:5-6 / 17: 15 / 19:2).

Chapters 17 and 18 are tragic because they show the extreme spiritual and psychological condition of mankind at the time of the Tribulation. But in its description we find solace in the fact that God's judgment is righteous. Now as we enter chapter 19 we will see another view of the destruction. A view from heaven as a great multitude proclaims "Hallelujah!" over and over as they announce the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. Our King, Redeemer and Savior.

"Hallelujah!"

LESSON 89

Revelation, chapter 19 verses 1-5

Quick Recap and Introduction to Chapter 19:

The last three chapters of Revelation have given us a unique view into a world we can scarcely imagine. The last seven judgment actions of God will rock the earth with divine wrath as they destroy satan's false religion, the antichrist's demonic kingdom and the unredeemed remnant of humanity. These will conclude God's holy and righteous wrath against a mankind who will recognize who God is, yet choose to follow satan and the lure of earthly riches. In these chapters we saw seven horrific judgments focused on the destruction of two "Babylons" - one focused on man's lusts for pagan worship, and the other, a city, the seat of power of the antichrist's short-lived kingdom.

Let's step back for just a moment to recall what we've seen in the last three chapters as a precursor of the glorious events we will see in chapter 19.

- Chapter 16 gave a brief description of the seven Bowl judgments. These will be the last of twenty-one Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments God will bring against all creation during the seven year Tribulation. By the point in time discussed in chapter 16 the world will have gone through nearly seven years of war, famine, pestilence, demon attacks, cosmic disturbances, natural disasters, world-wide darkness, blistering heat and festering sores. During the same seven year period the antichrist will rise to power, create a one-world order, declare himself to be god, establish a pagan religion through the false-prophet and seek to destroy anyone who will not worship him. Then, near the end of the Tribulation, God will pour His most horrific judgments upon the earth, the Bowls, as Jesus the Warrior King, returns triumphant to destroy the antichrist, his evil empire and his disillusioned followers. The description of the Bowl judgments in chapter 16 is fairly short but God provides additional details in chapters 17-19 to help us understand what will be happening during that period of time, but more importantly, to help us see the unholy spiritual condition of unredeemed man and the depth of his wicked character.
- Chapter 17 gave us a detailed view of the first "Babylon", the unholy religion. Sometimes called "Mystery Babylon", it represents the world-wide pagan religion that will be established by the false-prophet. Personified as a demonic woman, the Bible calls her, "The Mother of Prostitutes and the Abominations of the Earth". A name befitting her wickedness and evil as the whole world is brought under her demonic spell. The imagery used to describe this religion is a woman riding a beast (the antichrist) - an indication that "she" will impose control over the antichrist and his empire. Probably through her demonically-driven spiritual influence over the people of the antichrist's subjects. (Revelation 17:7). But he will recognize her power over the people and violently destroy her religion, thereby forcing the people to worship him and killing those who don't. (Revelation 17:16).
- Chapter 17 also provides a complex description of the antichrist that, "...calls for a mind with wisdom..." to understand. (Revelation 17:9). Here John compares the antichrist's characteristics to that of his leader satan (Revelation 12:3), but then expounds on the physical imagery seen in 13:1 (and Daniel 7) to help us understand that the antichrist will be the last of seven empires satan has or will use in a futile attempt to destroy Israel and God's people. (Revelation 17:9-14)

- Chapter 18 describes the destruction of the second "Babylon" - the unholy city - the last of the seven wicked empires of satan. This will be the seat of power for the antichrist and the infrastructure of his evil empire. It's amazing that during the seven year Tribulation - a time of unprecedented destruction and suffering- mankind will find a way to create a flourishing economy and grow rich, "...from her excessive luxuries." (Revelation 18:3). But at its hay-day God will destroy the antichrist's empire and in doing so destroy its economy and the source of man's wealth and greed. When this happens the pathetic reaction of its inhabitants will be seen through the eyes of three groups - the "kings", "merchants" and "sea captains". Through them we see terror and grief as they woe and wail over their lost city. Not for the welfare of their family or friends, but because they have lost the focus of their true passion - their lust for material wealth.

Now in chapter 19 we see the source of their final destruction - the glorious and much anticipated Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the Righteous and Holy Warrior King (Revelation 19:11). Jesus will return near the end of the seven Bowl judgments to destroy the armies of man, the antichrist, the false-prophet, their civil infrastructure and all who follow them. An event foretold by Jude, "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (Jude 14-15 / Revelation 19:11-14). In His first coming Jesus arose from the grave victorious over our sin. Now, at His Second Coming, He will return from heaven as the Victor to defeat all sources of sin. His victory will remove the blight of sin from His creation, establish his thousand-year Millennial Kingdom and welcome all believers to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

To help us understand the flow of chapter 19 let's quickly review its chronology of events:

- Verses 1-5 - A chorus of celebration as the heavenly host proclaims the glory and power of God, praising Him for the destruction of the false religion Mystery Babylon and the city Babylon, the seat of the antichrist's power.
- Verses 6-10 - The heavenly host announces an event that will actually occur after Christ returns - the wedding supper of the Lamb - the revealing and glorification of the faithful church as His bride.
- Verses 11-21 - Christ returns. Not as a humble man offering God's grace to a fallen people, and not as the One who gave His life for the sin of man. At His Second Coming Christ returns as the Warrior King, "With justice he judges and wages war." (V11). This is Jesus in His role as the Righteous Judge bearing God's vengeance as he meets the world on the battlefield of Armageddon to personally destroy the antichrist, his empire and all who follow Him. (Revelation 16:16 / 19:17-21).

Now, with that context let's begin chapter 19 - the glorious return of our King. -- Hallelujah!!!

1. "After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah!" Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2. for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants. 3. And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." 4. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

"Amen, 'Hallelujah!'" 5. Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!"

1. "After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah!" Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,..."

1.a. - "After this..."

This phrase places chapter 19 chronologically after chapter 18 (which is not always the case in Revelation). Here we see a brief interval between the seven Bowl judgments and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. It is the time of Christ's Second Coming and the destruction of Tribulation man. By this point, John has seen the pouring-out of God's final wrath, the destruction of both the false-prophet's pagan religion - "Mystery Babylon", and the antichrist's evil empire - the "city Babylon". Then the narrative changed (Revelation 18:20) when John hears a mighty angel declare, "Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you." (Revelation 18:20). Now John will hear the rest of the celebration and then see the details of Christ's return.

1.b. - "I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:..."

This is the celebration of Babylon that started in chapter 18 when the angel describes the completeness and finality of the empire's destruction. (Revelation 18:20-24) Now in chapter 19 we hear more clearly the joyous celebration in heaven with the "...roar of a great multitude...". This is the sound of jubilation in heaven that accompanies the return of Jesus. It is difficult for us to imagine what it will sound like when all of heaven's host are "...shouting..." praise for the return of Christ and the destruction of sin. John describes it as a "...roar...", a loud, deafening, crescendo of sound as angels, "...numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousands..." (Revelation 5:11) plus the Four Living Creatures and a chorus on Old Testament Saints, Tribulation Saints, and the raptured church - literally hundreds-of-millions of voices all join in unison to praise our Holy King. – Goodness, that is so encouraging!

To give us a feel for the enormity of this praise let's look back on several other heavenly celebrations as the hosts looked forward to the day when they would praise the end of judgment and the reign of Jesus:

- In chapter 5, Jesus, the Holy Lamb of God takes the judgment scroll from the Father's hand. In celebration for what is about to happen the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders (arguably, the raptured church) sang,
- "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its Seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10).
- Then John "...heard the voice of many angels...", probably hundreds-of-millions of angelic voices saying to God,
- "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Revelation 5:11-12).
- Then every creature "...in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them...", said:
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb! Be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13)

- In chapter 7 the "...great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." - the vast army of Tribulation Saints will cry out:
"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:10).
- They were joined by the angels around the throne, the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders who said:
"Amen! Praise and Glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" (Revelation 7:12).
- In chapter 11 when the seventh angel sounded his Trumpet the "...loud voices..." in heaven and the Twenty-Four Elders sang a preemptive song looking forward to the day when Christ would reign:
"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever..." (Part of Revelation 11:15-18).
- When satan is thrown from heaven by the angel Michael there will be rejoicing over the fact he will have, "...lost their place in heaven...". (Revelation 12:8).
"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah..." (Part of Revelation 12:10-12).
- In the preview of Christ's return we will see the 144,000 witnesses sing, "...a new song before the throne..." (Revelation 14:3).
- Prior to the seven judgment Bowl's being poured on creation, John's saw into the throne room and heard the martyrs before the throne as they sang the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Both songs celebrate rescue and redemption, looking forward to the time of Christ's kingdom on earth.
"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Revelation 15:3-4).
- As the seven Bowls are poured the "...angel in charge of the waters..." will say:
"You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink, as they deserve." (Revelation 16:5-6).
"And I heard the altar respond" "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments." (Revelation 16:7).

Now in chapter 19 we hear the concluding voices of those in heaven as they sing praises to God after the final judgments are complete. Why is it important to review the songs we've already heard? So that we can see how important these songs are and to understand that in heaven God is given continuous praise. Even before the first Seal was opened the heavenly host sang of God's holiness, His power, His righteousness and His glory. They clarified that His judgments are righteous, and they proclaimed the end of judgment when the Messiah's kingdom will be established on earth. The hosts of heaven didn't wait for the kingdom to start before they praised Jesus. They didn't wait till the final battle is won and sin is destroyed. They didn't wait for the antichrist and his empire to fall before they proclaimed victory. The hosts of heaven knew these things would happen and they began to praise them long before they will actually occur. Why? Because they trust God to do what He says He will do without waiting to see if He will actually do it. --- There is a lesson here for us as well. How often do we wait to praise God until after we've seen answered prayers? How often do we praise God after our blessings are received? How often

do we praise God after we have seen Him move in our lives? - More importantly, how often do we praise Him before any of these things happen? To me, that is the story behind the preemptive praise of God throughout the book of Revelation. They are praising today, right now, as we speak, for things that have not yet occurred. - May we do the same.

1.c. - "Hallelujah!"

This is a word we have heard so many times in songs and poems and exultation. Here, in its transliterated form it is used only four times in the New Testament, and all four are in this chapter. The term comes from the Hebrew root "hal-lu" (to praise) and "Yah-weh" (YHWH - the Lord). Most often interpreted in the Old Testament as "Praise the Lord", here in chapter 19, which was written in Greek, it is transliterated back to the Hebrew as "Hallelujah."

The term indicates great praise, gratitude and admiration. Often used in the Psalms it is associated with the Hebrew song of praise, the "Hallel", found most notably in Psalms 113-118, but also in 120-136 and 145-159. Psalms 118 may be the song sung by Jesus and His apostles after the Lord's Supper, "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:30 / Mark 14:26). It is a Messianic Psalm, often quoted in the New Testament praising the name of the Lord because "...his love endures forever...". It speaks of God's love for His people Israel and the blessings He bestows on His people. Its use here in chapter 19 emphasizes the glory of our all holy God who rescues His people when He, "...avenged on her the blood of his servants." (V2) -- - Hallelujah!!!

Here in chapter 19 we see the term used four times. We'll discuss three in this lesson:

The first Hallelujah (V1-2) was shouted by "...a great multitude in heaven:

- It praises God for "...Salvation..." (V1.d) - Not just the redemptive transformation of the souls of believers, but for the sense they are now saved from sin and satan for eternity.
- It proclaims the fact that, "...glory and power belongs to our Lord.", because at this point there will be no evil power remaining on earth and our Lord will reign as the all Supreme Ruler.
- It praises God because His judgment actions are, "...true and just....". (V2) He has now validated and removed all doubt that He is "...the way and the truth and the life...." (John 14:6), and that His actions against satan and his followers are righteous and just.
- He is praised because He, "...has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries...". This speaks both to the wicked religion Mystery Babylon (Revelation 17:5) and the evil power-base and infrastructure Babylon of the antichrist. (Revelation 18:10/16/19).
- And in doing so, "He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." - This is the complete and total destruction and repayment through God's vengeance (Romans 12:19). Repayment for the centuries of disobedience and for the call of the martyred saints who cried out, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood." (Revelation 6:10).

The second Hallelujah (V3) was "...shouted..." "...again..."

Praising God that, "The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." Indicating the destruction of the Babylon empire and religion will be destroyed "...forever and ever...", never to return again. This is the destruction seen by the kings, merchants and sea captains as they watched, "...the smoke of her burning..." (Revelation 18:9), validating God's promise that, "She will be consumed by fire,

for mighty is the Lord God who judges her." (Revelation 18:8). This is the fulfillment of the promise made so long ago through Joel, "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Joel 2:30-31),

The third Hallelujah (V4-5) was sounded as, "The Twenty-Four Elders and the Four Living Creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, "Hallelujah!"

- Here the revelers stand before the throne. The Four Living Creatures - angelic beings who fly around God's throne, "Day and night they never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (Revelation 4:8). They are joined by the Twenty-Four Elders - probably best understood as the raptured church. Together they join the roar of the heavenly chorus and, "...fell down and worshiped God...". Bowing before their Almighty Lord they give praise in both the song of joy and the posture of servitude. Here the addition of the word "Amen" adds emphasis to the profound nature of Hallelujah. In Hebrew and in Greek the root word can mean "truth, faithful, most assuredly or so let it be." Its use here brings attention to the fact their song of praise is a praise of truth. The truth that everything God said He would do in his end-times prophecies is now done. It is a solid affirmation to the absolute supreme truth of God's word.
- Lastly they are joined by, "...a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!" (V5) - A voice from the throne room of God commanding the praise of the Lord. A proclamation to "...all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small...". This is a call to all the faithful who are now praising God's victory over all sin. The pre-Abrahamic believers, the Old Testament saints, the pre-cross Messianic believers, the church-age redeemed of Christ, the recovered remnant of Israel and the Tribulation believers. All stand before God and praise the victory of the Lamb.

But there is one Hallelujah remaining; arguably the most beautiful of all. We will discuss that in our next lesson.

LESSON 90

Revelation, chapter 19 verses 6-10

Quick Recap:

In verses 1-5 we saw revelry in heaven as the hosts and saints praise Jesus for His victory over the world. There we heard a chorus of celebration as those of us in heaven will proclaim the glory and power of God; praising Him for destruction of the false religion "Mystery Babylon", and the "city Babylon", the antichrist's seat of demonic power. This praise will create a "...roar..." as hundreds-of-millions of combined voices --- Old Testament saints, church-age believers, redeemed Israel and Tribulation saints --- shout a praise of four Hallelujahs to our Glorious and Almighty God.

Now we'll focus on verses 6-10. These continue the heavenly celebration of Christ's victory over the antichrist but turns its focus towards a very unique event as Jesus prepares to enter His millennial reign.

Now, with that recap let's explore the beautiful story in verses 6-10.

6. "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah" For our Lord God almighty reigns. 7. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.) 9. Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." 10. At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus."

6. "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah" For our Lord God almighty reigns."

Now in the second part of chapter 19 praise continues as the fourth and final Hallelujah chorus proclaims an event so amazing and so anticipated we can scarcely read it without shouting Hallelujah ourselves. The chorus of believers and the heavenly host - the "...great multitude..." - combine their voices to roar and reverberate like a cascade of rushing waters. But now the sound, "...like loud peals of thunder..." is no longer the voice of a judgment mood, but is the joy of recognition that Christ's kingdom has come and, "...our Lord God Almighty reigns."

7. and 8. - "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

7.a. - "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come...", The focus of the fourth Hallelujah is an event called, "...the wedding of the Lamb...". To help us understand what that means God uses the imagery of an ancient Jewish wedding festival to illustrate the eternal and beautiful relationship between Christ and His church.

In nearly every culture, ancient or modern, pagan or Judo-Christian, a wedding is one of the most anticipated, celebrated and expensive events in society. Even today, the average wedding in America costs over \$34,000 and often takes months to plan. Over the centuries the process of preparing for a wedding has evolved into a multi-billion dollar industry. Rings, dresses, catering, facilities rental, invitations, honeymoon expenses and an elaborate dinner can easily run into the tens-of-thousands of dollars. All for a ceremony that at-best lasts a few hours. That's because throughout history a wedding is a time for family and friends to show love and devotion, as those near and far come together to celebrate the union of two lives and two families. This most often involves the joining of two individuals but many times in history weddings have been used to join two nations or two people-groups through a royal or political arrangement.

Ancient Israel was no exception and by the time Jesus was on earth a wedding was a long and expensive affair that could last for several days. It was one of the most important social events in the life of a person, their families and their community. We see an example of this in the wedding of Sampson which included a feast that lasted seven days. (Judges 14:10-12). Weddings were a time of gatherings as friends and family came together to celebrate the event. In fact, it was at a wedding ceremony Jesus attended with Mary that was the catalyst for His first recorded miracle. (John 2:1-10).

A wedding in ancient Israel was extravagant, often planned years in advance and slowly progressed through three distinct phases: The Betrothal, The Presentation and The Ceremony. Let's briefly review each of these steps and their application to understanding the bride of Christ and the wedding of the Lamb:

- The Betrothal

In Hebrew a betrothal is called a Erusin – an "Engagement," a "mutual commitment, that was a legally binding contract, between two families, and sometimes arranged by the parents before their children were even born. Marriage was viewed more as a union of two families than it was of two people. Romantic love was considered a secondary consideration, if it existed at all. More important was the joining together of two families of like mind and interests who would help support and defend each other in the future. Their connection, through the union of their children, was a binding commitment that was taken very seriously. The groom's family generally took care of the cost but also paid a dowry, called a "mohar", to the father of the bride. We see this in the story of Isaac and Rebekah illustrated by the mohar paid to her father Laban, "When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground before the Lord. Then the servant brought out gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave costly gifts to her brother and her mother." (Genesis 24:52-53). This was a way for the groom's family to honor the bride and her family by paying a "bride price" so to speak, for her hand in marriage. Jesus alluded to this prior arrangement between Himself and the body of believers when He prayed for those who would become the "church" - those who were given to Him by the Father, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you

loved me before the creation of the world." (John 17:24). This ancient arrangement, basically a promise to give of Christ to the church, mirrored the Jewish custom of betrothal. A reference to this commitment is also seen in John 3:16-17 when God the Father gave His only begotten Son so that the world may be saved and made righteous through His divine dowry. A dowry God paid with the most precious of all gifts - His own Son's blood.

This prior arrangement was considered legally binding, and at the time of Betrothal a Hebrew couple was considered legally married even though there had not been a ceremony and they did not yet live together. That's why Joseph felt he must divorce Mary when he found out she was with child, "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged [betrothed] to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband [called a "husband" but not yet married] was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." (Matthew 1:18-19). Since the couple was considered "married" at the time of Betrothal, even if they were not yet born, breaking the contract required a legal divorce. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, explained the situation and told him, "...do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife..." (Matthew 1:20).

- The Presentation

7.b. and 8. - "...and his bride has made herself ready..." 8. "Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)".

Joseph taking Mary home to be his wife points to the next phase of the marriage process - the Presentation of the bride to her husband's Father. In ancient Israel it was customary for a groom to retrieve his wife from her father's home and bring her to his father's house to live. Prior to that, during the betrothal period, he would have added a room or maybe a separate wing or building on his father's property to prepare a place for him and his bride to live. This is a beautiful illustration of the promise Jesus made to us in John chapter 14, "My father's house has many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Here we see Jesus, the betrothed Son of God, having paid the price for His bride, returns to His Father's home to prepare a place for her. Here Jesus promises to, "...take you to be..." "...where I am..." (John 14:3). A beautiful connection back to His prayer in the garden, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...". In both cases Jesus expresses the desire for His bride - the body of believers - to be with Him in His Father's house.

This parallels the Jewish marriage process. When the time came for the ceremony the bride would be retrieved by the groom and publicly presented in all her splendor and purity, and brought from her home to the house of the groom's father. So let's think about that in terms of today's lesson, "For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Revelation 19:7). Remember what we discussed in John 14:3, that Jesus, the Groom, will come to take His bride to the home of His Father. Not only is this a beautiful illustration of the husband preparing a home for his bride, but it is also a reference to the Rapture when the Lord comes to gather His people and take

them to be with Him forever. This is the time when Jesus will return to retrieve His bride so He can present her to His Father and those who have gathered for the celebration. Paul clarifies this connection to the Thessalonians when he explained that Jesus will come for, "...we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord..." (1 Thessalonians 4:17). At that point Jesus does not place His feet on the earth, as He will during the "Second Coming", but gathers His bride to take her to His Father's home for eternity. This is reflective of the conditions set by Jesus in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In other words, the only way for us to be presented to the Father as the bride of Christ is to go through Jesus and the ransom the Father paid through His Son on the cross, "For this reason Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant." (Hebrews 9:15). So then, it is the Rapture - the gathering of Christ's church to be with Him forever, that is seen in the illustration of the groom gathering his bride to take her home.

So how does the bride become, "...dressed in fine linen, white and clean..."? To the church at Sardis Jesus warned them of their sin and shared with them a promise to those who would be faithful, "They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. (Revelation. 3:4-5) These people, part of the bride will be washed cleaned by Jesus. But how? After the Rapture Jesus will return to heaven with His bride to the place He has prepared for her -- just like the Israelite husband. There will then follow a judgment, the judgment of the righteous, sometimes called the "Bema Seat" (bema is Greek for platform), where every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be evaluated for what we did with our salvation. This is not a judgment of heaven or hell but is the time when Jesus will burn away all unrighteousness from His bride leaving us pure and clean. Paul explains it this way, "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). This is not a judgment of your sin. Our sin was judged on the cross. (Ephesians 1:7). This judgment is to reward us (or not) for what we did with our salvation to glorify God. It is the act of offering, "...your body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God..." (Romans 12:1), which is what gives us the, "...righteous acts of God's holy people." Paul further explains this judgment day, "...their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives the builder will receive a reward." In other words, the loving fire of Jesus will burn away the chaff of our sinful life, the, "...wood, hay and straw...", and leave a new creation of righteousness. A bride dressed in white. (1 Corinthians 3:12-13). This will be the redeemed and raptured church, refined to remove all impurities and made new as the bride. The perishable will be imperishable, dishonor will be glorified, weakness will be power, as the natural body, "...is raised a spiritual body." (Paraphrased from 1 Corinthians 15:42-44). This is the bride - the true believers in Christ. Betrothed to Jesus, gathered at the Rapture and presented spotless and righteous before the Father.

A quick side note - we'll talk more about this later in chapter 19 but please do not confuse the "Rapture" with the "Second Coming". The Rapture is the time - prior to the Tribulation - when

Jesus returns to gather his bride - the "church" of true believers. In that event Jesus does not place His feet on the earth but instead we will be, "...caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Jesus will not come to earth at that point but gathers His bride to Him in the clouds. In contrast, the Second Coming is the event we previewed in Revelation 14:1 when Jesus, the Lamb, is seen "...standing on Mount Zion." A fulfillment of Job's prophecy of the Redeemer who, "...in the end he will stand on the earth" (Job 19:25b), and of Zechariah's prophecy about the Day of the Lord when, "...on that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem..." (Zechariah 14:4). This is not the day Jesus gathers His bride, but is the Second Coming by which time to Rapture will have already occurred. The Second Coming is the day Jesus returns to destroy the antichrist and the remnant of unredeemed man so He can establish His kingdom with His bride. This is the event described in Revelation 19:11-16 when Jesus returns to the earth with His people, the bride, "...following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." This is the same description given of the clothing the purified bride will wear in Revelation 19:8. Jesus, betrothed to the church, will have already returned to take [Rapture] her to His Father's house to be with Him for ever and ever. Later, she will be with Him when He returns at His Second Coming to begin His kingdom reign with His bride. The bride who in her righteous state is now presented to the earth. I mention all of that here because I want to make sure we're straight on the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming. The Rapture of the church, the retrieval of the bride - occurs before the Tribulation starts. We see that in Paul's explanation to the church in Rome, "Since we have been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:9). Jesus also alluded to this to the faithful church at Philadelphia, "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 3:10). In contrast, the Second Coming occurs at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus returns with His bride to destroy the antichrist and unredeemed man. Many Christians confuse the two events and even pray for the Second Coming. Hopefully, through the wedding analogy we now see the proper chronology.

So here we see the embodiment of the bride; the church of faithful believers. But how do we know Christ is the groom? Paul made this very clear in his explanation to the church at Corinth, "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." (2 Corinthians. 11:2). Likewise, in his message to the Ephesians Paul compared the love of a Christian man for his wife to that of Jesus and the church, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior." (Ephesians 5:22) In this passage we also see reference to Christ as the husband "washing" His bride, the church. A beautiful affirmation of what we saw in verse 8 describing the bride as clean and righteous and washed in the blood of the Lamb. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:27). Paul then reminds us that even though he's using this relationship as a teaching aid for husbands, he is actually talking about Christ as the Groom and the body of believers as the bride, "This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:32). From this it is clear that the church, "...without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless..." is reflective of John's description of the church as a bride, who has "...made herself ready..." for the groom, with "...Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous

acts of God's holy people.)" (Revelation 19:7-8). It is also clear that Jesus is the role of the husband, washing and cleansing His bride. Even Jesus called Himself a bridegroom. When the wicked Pharisees asked Jesus why His disciples didn't fast as they did [fasting being viewed as a sign of sorrow and need], Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom is taken from them: then they will fast." (Matthew 9:15) This sentiment is echoed by John the Baptist when he was asked if he was the Messiah, "...I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice." (John 3:27-29) - Clearly Jesus is the bridegroom and the church is the bride. A fact even illustrated in parables, "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son" (Matthew. 22:1-2), and "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom." (Matthew. 25:1). But let's be careful not to link these two parables to the bride in Revelation. They are clearly examples of Christ being referred to as the bridegroom but they are probably not directly related to the church as the end-times bride. The first parable is a story of grace being offered first to Israel and then to the Gentiles, and the second is a warning to be prepared for the return of Jesus. Neither mention the bride, but instead focus on the groom.

- The Ceremony

In Hebrew the ceremony is called a Nissuin - "To take". Even today, a Jewish wedding is a joyous celebration. In fact, the Hebrew word for the ceremony "simcha" means "joyous celebration." The wedding protocol is used here in Revelation to illustrate and celebrate the beautiful union between Christ and His bride, the church - the body of faithful believers. The culminating action to join the Groom with the bride to reign in their eternal home.

In closing this section it is probably good to clarify an often misunderstood point. The term "church" used to describe the "bride" does not mean an organized assemblage of people or a specific denomination. It represents a grouping of individual believers who have been redeemed from sin by their confessed faith in Christ as the Son of God, and who understand they have been bought with a ransom paid for through His life, death and resurrection. The "church" does not mean a building, or pews or even a gathering of "religious" people. The term is used to define the congregant assemblage of true born-again believers who have come to saving grace through Jesus. Not through sacrament, or prosperity, or church attendance, or through good works. It is for nothing the bride has done, but what the Groom has done. He was betrothed to her, He prepared a place for her, He paid a dowry for her and He has promised to return to retrieve her. The connotation of the bride should not be demeaned by comparing it to organized religion. As a human bride is made of many parts working together as one, so the bride of Christ is made of many true believers all focused on their Savior Jesus. Therefore, the imagery of a wedding celebration and supper is used to help the reader understand the importance of the body of believers - called the "church" - to Christ and the extended relationship He has had with His bride to be His and His alone.

9. "Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

This is a complex story, told through the lens of an Israelite wedding process. Given its complexity the angel tells John to write it down. This affirms that no matter how complicated the illustration

is, it is God's desire to document it so that we can understand it, and to verify it is the "...true words of God." --- But here we see a slight twist. The focus turns from the Groom and the bride to the invited guests. But who are they? Certainly not the Groom or the bride because they would not be invited to their own wedding. It appears to include the heavenly hosts who are with God in heaven when the bride is presented, and probably includes the Old Testament saints, those saved by faith prior to a clear Messianic message, those saved by faith in the coming Messiah, the redeemed remnant of Israel, the Tribulation saints who came to Christ and were martyred, and any Tribulation saints still alive at the end of judgment. They all join the bride (the post-rapture / pre-Tribulational believers) as they celebrate with the Groom and reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation. 20:4) This is also an indication that the wedding supper of the Lamb occurs at the end of the Tribulation.

10. At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus."

Recall John's reaction in chapter 1 when he saw Jesus, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17). Apparently, John fainted from the emotion of seeing Jesus in His judgment state with eyes like blazing fire and feet like bronze. When that happened Jesus revived him and said, "Do not be afraid." But now John is so overcome by the enormity of what he has seen that he falls prostrate before the angel; apparently in an act of worshiping him. But the angel quickly reminds John that he is not to be worshiped. He is simply a "...fellow servant with you...", who reminds John that God and God alone is worthy of our worship. It is also a reminder that we, the body of true believers, the bride, are to look with anticipation to the coming of the Groom and let nothing, even the overwhelming nature of this story or the presence of angels distract us from that promise.

The story of the bride is a story of Christ's appearing. After the betrothal of Christ by the Father He appeared on earth to pay the dowry for His bride. Not with earthly riches but by His own precious gift of blood. After the ransom was paid He returned home to prepare a place for her. Soon He will appear again to retrieve her, in the Rapture, and take her home for the ceremony. He will then appear again at His Second Coming to rid her world of sin so that she (we) may reign with Him in His kingdom and through eternity.

But how often do we really think about this? How often do we truly pray, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" (Revelation 22:17 and 20). How often do we think of ourselves as a betrothed bride, chastened and faithful as we patiently wait for the Groom to appear? How often do we cheapen the Groom's life-paid dowry by playing Christian or staining our blood-bought testimony? John refers to this Christ-centered attitude when he says, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3). Likewise, Paul stresses the yearning we must have for our Rapture and the preparations we must make, "...I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Timothy 6:14).

We see this clearly in Paul's explanation to Timothy and Titus when he eloquently and beautifully ties this whole story together, from betrothal to eternity,

- Betrothal - "He has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Timothy 1:10).
- Presentation - "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait patiently for the blessed hope - the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (Titus 2:11-14).
- Ceremony - Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for your appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8)

Yes Lord Jesus, Come. We yearn and long for You.

LESSON 91

Revelation, chapter 19 verses 11-13

Quick Recap:

We've waited a long time to get to this point in Revelation. Our diligent study through 19 chapters has finally brought us to one of the most anticipated events in the Bible -- the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

This event is so critically important to us as believers because it will be the final point on the timeline of humanity when Jesus will return victorious to rid His creation of every sin and every source of sin. It will be the time when man's kingdom is ended and Christ's Kingdom has begun. It will be the time when God's creation will begin to shift from the fallen world of man back to the perfect world of God. It will be the time spoken of by Job when he prophetically proclaimed, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand with his feet on the earth." (Job 19:25). There He will stand, with His feet in Israel, on Mount Zion, (Revelation 14:1), all-powerful and all-holy, as He stomps the winepress of vengeful wrath on His fallen creation. It is then, "...his fury will be shown to his foes. See, the Lord coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the Lord will execute punishment on all people, and many will be slain by the Lord." (Isaiah 66:14-16). It will be the day when, "The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble..." (Joel 3:16) It will be the time when Jesus will fulfill the curse placed on Satan so long ago in the garden that one day He would crush his head. (Genesis 3:15b). This will be the time prophesied by so many, for so long, as a warning that God will destroy the wicked realm of Satan and the fallen souls of mortal man in order to establish His eternal kingdom for His redeemed children.

The day of destruction will not come slowly but will be an event of sudden shock and awe as Jesus, the Holy Warrior King and Righteous Judge brings wrath and carnage to destroy all that is left of Satan's seed. His destructive force will be quick, decisive and complete as blow after blow of His punishing and unrelenting power crushes all rebellion and eliminates all who rebel. He will come as a thief - unexpected - but His coming will be like a heavenly battering-ram with forces we cannot even imagine.

And in the blink of an eye, it will be over. -- In response the heavenly host and followers of Christ will declare a chorus of four powerful Hallelujahs and the bride, now vindicated and righteous, with her guests, will be led into God's kingdom forever.

So why will this happen? Very simply: for millennia God has offered His grace and mercy to a wholly undeserving world. From the first bite of forbidden fruit He has been patient and caring, offering to love and redeem anyone who seeks forgiveness through salvation. He has given fully of Himself, paid the most costly bride-price and given every person every opportunity to repent. But in the end relatively few will turn to Him. Instead, they will continue to blaspheme His name and turn their hearts to self-satisfaction and idolatry to satisfy their sinful lusts. Then at the end of human time, at the conclusion of the Tribulation, when unredeemed man is on the cusp of extermination, there will be a generation who will curse the name of God even when they realize

He is the Lord. It is then, in the face of unrelenting disobedience and rejection, the angel will cry, "There will be no more delay!" and Jesus will return. (Revelation 10:6). At the end of the seven years, at the conclusion of Daniel's final week, as the Tribulation draws to a close, and as the final wrath of the twenty-one judgments have been revealed, blasted and poured, Jesus will come to vindicate His name, clear His creation of sin and establish His earthly kingdom for His bride.

This will be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Since chapter 19 is so important to our understanding of Revelation lets quickly review the complex chronology of chapters 16 through 19 to help us understand when the Second Coming will occur.

Chapter 16

Here we saw a glimpse of God's final judgment actions - the seven "Bowls". These will come after the seven Seals and seven Trumpets, and will be singularly horrific judgments poured on the universe, earth and mankind as God destroys the antichrist, the false-prophet, what is left of unrepentant man, and then prepares the earth for the Millennial Kingdom. Remember, chapter 16 is just a brief overview of each judgment and spans time from the pouring of the first Bowl through the return of Christ, the destruction of the antichrist's empire, and the climactic ending at the Battle of Armageddon. Each of the Bowls are discussed in chapter 16, but more detail of what will happen during that time is provided in chapters 17-19.

Chapter 17

This chapter helps us understand the spiritual depravity of those remaining on earth during the Tribulation. With the exception of those who come to Jesus during this terrible time, the remainder of the earth's population will blaspheme God even though they know who the Father and Jesus are. They will have heard the gospel from 144,000 Jewish evangelists, two witnesses, the testimony of those saved during the Tribulation, and a proclaiming angel who shouts the gospel to every ear of every man. Yet despite this constant offer of gospel mercy, mankind will turn away from God and form a pagan religion aptly named "Mystery Babylon the Great Mother of Prostitutes and the Abominations of the Earth". It is hard for us to imagine what this world-wide religion of depravity will be like as the sin-driven population of the world, deceived by the signs and wonders of the false-prophet, gyrate to a satan-focused frenzy of pagan worship.

Then something totally unexpected happens. The antichrist will turn on the religion and destroy it in a fit of jealous rage. Possibly because he recognizes the power the religion will have over the people and wants it all for himself. So he will destroy the religion and refocus the sinful remnant of mankind's religious fervor on him, as he declares himself to be god.

Chapter 18

Once the antichrist destroys Mystery Babylon he will be in total control. Through his world-wide government, military, economy and religion, the antichrist will rule a world bathed in sin through a government of sin as he seeks to destroy anyone and anything related to God. He will build an empire of sin that drives man to the worship of material wealth. An empire with a seat of operations also called "Babylon". An empire of unequaled wickedness. By this point on the timeline of humanity the world and its remnant unrepentant population will have gone through seven years of horrific judgment - the Tribulation. Seven "Seals", seven "Trumpets" and seven

"Bowls" will bring God's wrath upon the earth in ways we can hardly imagine. War, pestilence, famine, cosmic destruction, natural disasters, demon attacks, oozing sores and total darkness will inflict mankind with continuous punishment from God. Yet, their wickedness will be so complete that even in the midst of judgment after judgment man will find a way to prosper. As the antichrist rules the world, man will fall into the worship of satan and focus their passions on the last vestige of material wealth. --- But destruction will come and near the end of the Bowl judgments God will destroy the antichrist's empire. His infrastructure will topple and burn as the leaders and people of the world, personified by the "kings", "merchants" and "sea captains", stand at a distance to wail and lament over the loss of their prized possessions. It will be at this point Christ will bring final destruction on mankind. On those who will foolishly gather on the Plains of Megiddo to fight against God.

Now in this portion of chapter 19 we see the culminating event of God's judgment actions. This continues on the story started in Revelation 14:1 when John proclaimed, "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion...". We were then given a preview of His judgment actions in Revelation 14:14-20 which gives us an early view of a battle that will take place between Jesus and the armies of the world. Where that battle will take place is revealed when we are told, "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon". In preparation for the greatest and final of all battles God "...prepared the way..." (Revelation 16:12) for His enemies to come. But the way will not be a conveyance. It will be a trap.

But before we continue in chapter 19 let's review a point that is often debated. The difference between the Rapture of believers and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. --- In two of our earlier lessons we discussed in detail various thoughts on the difference between the Rapture, the Second Coming and their respective timing. Given their importance and the fact many Christians mistake the Second Coming for the Rapture we should review those lessons and our discussion about the analogy of an Israelite wedding festival to help us see the difference and understand their true chronology. But since this is so important I suggest you re-read those earlier lessons that what I believe scripture reveals:

- The Rapture of the church is illustrated by the Presentation of the bride. This is when the Israelite groom would retrieve his betrothed bride from her home and take her to his father's home where he had already prepared a place for her. The same promise Jesus made to us. (John 14:2 / 17:24). The Rapture occurs before the Tribulation when Jesus returns to gather His believers "...in the air...", but not on earth. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). It is a time of great rejoicing, not a time of great war. It is the time when Jesus will remove the obedient church to, "...keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth." (Revelation 3:10).
- The Second Coming - Is not the Rapture. It occurs near the end of the seven Bowl judgments when Jesus returns to destroy the antichrist, the false-prophet and the remainder of unrepentant man. It is not a joyful gathering of believers in the air as we will see in the Rapture, but is a moment of horrific destruction when Jesus will come as the Warrior King of Revelation 19:11. It is a time preceded by great destruction, the antichrist's empire and great darkness. It is the time Jesus will put His feet firmly and powerfully on the earth (Job 19:25, Revelation 14:1, Zechariah 14:4) and reap the world of sin. It is the time when, "I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on

the ground." (Isaiah 63:6). And with His victory Jesus will establish His kingdom and rule with His bride. (Revelation 20:4-5).

- In theological terms this approach to scripture is called the:
 - Pre-Tribulational Rapture (Rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation), and the,
 - Pre-Millennial Second Coming of Christ (Christ comes at the end of the Tribulation and before the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom).

Revelation, chapter 19 verses 11-13

Now, with that context let's unpack this powerful passage of scripture.

11. I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him no one knows but he himself. 13. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God."

11. I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.

11.a. - "I saw heaven standing open and there before me...."

As we have seen several times the terms John uses, "...I saw..." and "...there before me..." indicates his view may be more than a simple vision. It has substance and form. Here John sees again into heaven and it has been opened. But here the view is not so John can see in, but so Jesus can come out. The Messiah, the Groom, who ascended into heaven to prepare a place for His bride, "...will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11). He went from earth to heaven, He prepared the place for the bride, He returned to retrieve her, and now as promised, He will return from heaven to earth to establish His kingdom. An event celebrated early in Revelation when the Twenty-four Elders (arguably, the raptured church) who were "...holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song..." "...And with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nations. You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:8b-9a-10).

11.b. - "...was a white horse....,"

Revelation uses a lot of imagery to make its point. That's so that people across cultures and centuries can clearly understand its meaning. Here we see a "...horse...". This is probably not a horse in the sense of a four-legged animal, but is a word that expresses power, might and speed. It would have been recognized by early readers as the steed upon which a triumphant king would ride. In this case the horse illustrates the difference between Jesus the Warrior King on His warhorse and Jesus the bride-price sacrifice who rode into Jerusalem "...gentle and riding on a donkey..." of peace. (Zechariah 9:9 / Matthew 21:2-3). The "...white..." color of the horse indicates purity and righteousness of its Rider (Revelation 19:8).

11.c. - "...whose rider is called Faithful and True.

The rider is Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Groom who paid the ultimate price for His bride. He is returning just as He said He would to fulfill all the promises He has made. Just as He presented Himself to the church at Laodicea, "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and

true witness, the ruler of God's creation (Revelation 3:14), He presents Himself here, faithful and true to His word, confirming that He is the "...the way, and the truth, and the life..." (John 14:6).

11.d. - With justice he judges and wages war."

As we have discussed several times over the last few months, the judgments of God are righteous and just (Revelation 19:2). Now in the end He comes, as promised, as the Warrior King, set on the destruction of everything sinful and unholy. He is God, "...a righteous judge, A God who displays his wrath every day. If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword, he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows." (Psalms 7:11-12).

12. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him no one knows but he himself."

12.a. - "His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns..."

John's first view of Jesus is Revelation made him faint. (Revelation 1:17). That's because the person of Christ he saw was that of the Warrior King, with, "...hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth as a sharp double-edged sword." (Revelation 1:14-16). This is clearly not the image of the gentle Jesus we picture on the donkey, but is the Mighty and All-Powerful Warrior King bedecked in His royal crowns, returning to earth to reap those who have perpetually rejected His offer of free grace.

12.b. - "...He has a name written on him no one knows but he himself."

This is a true mystery that we may someday understand, but for now, we will not speculate. Its hidden meaning reminds us that even with the detailed description John gives us there are things about God that we still do not understand.

13. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God."

13.a. - "He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood..."

Since the Battle of Armageddon will not be fought until later in the chapter the blood we see here is probably not the blood from that event. It may indicate the blood He shed for His bride, or more likely may represent the on-going battles in the spiritual realm as Christ's fights against sin. (Ephesians 6:12).

13.b. - "...and his name is the Word of God."

Yet another reminder of who this is. It is the same term John used to define Jesus in his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that light was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."..."The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-5/14).

Here John sees Jesus again, but now in His role as the Vengeful King. He is and always was the True Word, who blotted out the darkness. Now He returns to remove all darkness forever so that His eternal kingdom will need no sun or moon for illumination, "...for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (Revelation 21:23).

Hallelujah!!!

LESSON 92

Revelation Chapter 19, verses 14-16

Quick Recap:

After thousands of years of God's freely offered grace and seven years of Tribulation judgement, the remnant of unrepentant man comes to the point of no return. Lured to Meggiddo by satan's deception they will gather for war against Christ Himself. But Jesus, in His role as the Holy Judge and Righteous King will come to quickly destroy all who remain unloyal to Him. In this role He is not only Judge and jury but He is also the executioner. As unbelievable as that may seem, it is true. Jesus, in His Second Coming will return to carry out the sentence sinful man will choose to accept. Here we clearly see Jesus in His judgement role. Markedly different than His role as a shepherd during His first coming, He will now return as the Warrior King, with eyes like blazing fire and feet like burnished bronze and He comes at last, in a whirlwind of fury to clear His creation of sin and to vindicate the souls under the altar who, "...called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Revelation. 6:10). Now they will wait no longer.

With that background lets unpack this amazing passage.

14. "The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nation's. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

14. "The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean."

So who are the armies of heaven? Some believe they are angels. Maybe those warrior angels who through time and the Tribulation have played a role in God's judgment? Maybe the angels Jesus spoke of when He said, "The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels." (Matthew 13:39)? And maybe it is the angel with the sharp sickle and another in charge of fire that, "...swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath." (Revelation. 14:19)? But it appears the description in this verse points to more than just angels are part of God's army:

And could include:

- The Raptured Church - The mention of "...dressed in fine linen, white and clean..." is essentially the same description of the bride, the raptured church in Revelation 19:7, "For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear." Remember, the church is raptured before the Tribulation, which is why she can now return with Jesus to reign in His coming kingdom. (Revelation 20:4). Paul speaks to this blessed return when he tells the church in Colossae, "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3:4).

- The Tribulation Saints - Most of those saved during the Tribulation will be killed by the antichrist (Revelation 13:15 / 20:4). They are mentioned several times in Revelation but most clearly in 7:13-14. There John saw a great multitude standing before the throne and praising God for their salvation. When John asked who these people are the angel replied, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." As with the bride, their robes of white represents their "...righteous acts...". (Revelation 19:8).
- Old Testament Believers - Although not as clearly defined as those dressed in white, the returning saints may also include Old Testament believers. In 1 Thessalonians 3:13 Paul indicates Jesus will return, "...with *all* his holy ones...". Jude also indicates an all-inclusive army when he says, "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones..." (Jude 14). These may also be the wedding guests who will be "...invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb..." (Revelation 19:9).
- Israel - And it may include the redeemed of Israel. Those Jews saved through the message of the Messiah and through the church age. Isaiah seems to be speaking of these when he prophesied, "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion [Israel] to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor." (Isaiah 61:1-3). This indicates a day of deliverance and renewal for Israel associated with Christ's "...day of vengeance...". Incidentally, this is the same passage from Isaiah that Jesus read in the synagogue when He visited Nazareth. He read what we now know as verses 1 and half of verse 2, but stopped there and did not continue with the portion speaking of His Second-Coming. At that time in His ministry His focus was on His first coming and His message of grace. Not His Second-Coming and His message of wrath.

15. "Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nation's. He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."

15.a.- "Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nation's..."

Even though we, the body of Christ, the bride, will return with Jesus, scripture does not indicate we will actually fight. As much as we'd love to imagine ourselves as comrades-in-arms with our King on that day, with the power to destroy evil, I believe scripture indicates we will be observers, not fighters. We know the angels are warriors. We see that throughout the Bible and particularly in Revelation. They are powerful, mighty and aid God in the execution of judgment. But at the Second-Coming we will be the bride, who has made herself clean and ready. (Revelation. 19:8). We are not seen blood splattered like our King, (Revelation. 19:13) and we appear to have no weapons. In fact, the only weapon mentioned in this verse belongs to Jesus who has, "...a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations..." (Revelation. 19:15 / 21). But there is another beautiful verse which may indicate Jesus fights without the help of man., "Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood splattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. It was for me the day of vengeance; the year for me to redeem had come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no

one gave support; so my own arm achieved salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground. " (Isaiah 63:3-6). Here Jesus returns to bring horrific judgement on the nations - on mankind - but no nation stands by His side. No nation comes to His defense. So He fights alone against the whole world. We must remember that day will be the Lord's day...

- It is the Lord's day, not our day.
- It is the day the armies of the world. "...will wage war against the Lamb..." (Revelation. 17:14a).
- It is the day "...the Lamb will triumph over them..." (Revelation. 17:14b)
- It is the day He will, "...take your sickle and reap..." (Revelation. 14:15)
- It is the day, "...the Lord will roar from on high..." (Jeremiah 25:30)
- It is the day when, "...the Lord will go out to fight against those nations..." (Zechariah 14:3)
- It is the day, "...the Lord thunders at the head of his army..." (Joel 2:11)
- It is the day when Jesus declares four times, "I will..." "punish the world", "put an end to the arrogance", "make man scarcer than pure gold", "make the heavens tremble; the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger." (Isaiah 13:6-13)

Vengeance for sin belongs to the Lord (Isaiah 34:8 / Nahum 1:2), not us. Just as Jesus came the first time to destroy our sin on the cross, He will come the second time to destroy the vestige of all unrepentant sin on the battlefield of God. It is His day of retribution and glory.

15.b.- "He will rule them with an iron scepter..."

His judgement will be swift and looking ahead, He, the great Shepherd will rule His kingdom as Sovereign Lord to protect His sheep. (Revelation 2:27 / Psalms 2:9).

15.c.- "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."

We have seen this imagery several times in Revelation associated with the wrath of God. In the ancient world a winepress was a large vat where grapes would be stomped or pressed until all their juice was extracted, but here the term symbolizes the wrath of God treading the winepress of the earth until the life of unrepentant man is stomped out and Jesus, "...poured their blood on the ground..." (Isaiah 63:6). In chapter 14 we saw the extent of this judgment when we are told, "They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, [Jerusalem] and the blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as a horse's bridles [about 4 feet] for a distance of 1,600 stadia [about 185 miles]." (Revelation. 14:20). This describes the carnage of the Battle of Armageddon which will stretch from the Plains of Megiddo in the north to Edom in the south; roughly the length of Israel.

16. "On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

In chapter 17 we saw a preview of this event which connects the description of the army with Jesus, "They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and Kings and kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. (Revelation 17:14). Of all the names of Jesus in the Bible this phrase encompasses all descriptions. He is not only the single Sovereign King, but He rules supreme over all rulers for all time. He is not only the single Lord, but He is the Lord God Almighty who reigns over all creation. He is truly the Almighty Creator, the King, the Lord, the Savior, Redeemer, Rock and Fortress. And on that final Day of the Lord, He will be eternally victorious.

LESSON 93

Revelation Chapter 19, verses 17-21

Quick Recap:

Now in our study we reach the end of humanity as we know it today, the battle of Armageddon. The day when Jesus as the holy and divine Warrior King returns with His righteous army to defeat the antichrist and remove the final remnant of unrepentant man from the earth. The battle, carried-out on the famous Plains of Megiddo will stretch across Israel and bring carnage and destruction we can scarcely imagine. As we saw in verses 11-13 Jesus will strike the earth with a thunderous whirlwind of punishing fury. In His judgment role He has eyes of blazing fire, wears the royal crowns of an All-Sovereign Lord, and has a robe dipped in blood from countless battles against the demonic spiritual realm. Then in verses 14-16 we saw His army. Soldiered by powerful angels of judgment, but probably including His raptured bride and all of His faithful believers. He comes to battle with a sword coming out of His mouth. Symbolic of His ultimate power and supreme wrath. A weapon of creation that is now a weapon of destruction. His power is His Word, the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), "...alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12). It is the sword of ultimate judgment for those who will not repent (Revelation 1:16 / 2:16). It is reminiscent of a promise God made to Israel so many generations ago. "As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood, while my sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, the heads of the enemy leaders." (Deuteronomy. 32:40-42).

Jesus spoke of this horrible day in the Olivet Discourse, "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." (Matthew. 24:27-31)

This is the Day of the Lord. A day unlike any other day in history. The day when Christ's return will not only destroy man and physically alter the earth but a day when the universe itself will implode as the sun and moon are darkened and, "...every mountain and island was removed from its place." (Revelation. 6:12-14 / 16:16-20). This is the day mentioned so often in scripture. An ancient message of prophecy delivered over and over as a warning from God.

A day when:

- "You will break them with a rod of iron, you will dash them like pieces of pottery." (Psalms 2:9).
- "People will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from the fearful presence of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty when he rises to shake the earth." (Isaiah 2:19).
- "Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." (Zechariah 14:3-4).
- "Therefore wait for me", declares the Lord, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them - all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger." (Zephaniah 3:8).
- "Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble." (Joel 3:13-16).

This will be the time when man gathers together to defeat Christ, but unknown to them the reason they gather for battle will not be their own idea. They will gather because God will call them there for destruction. In doing so He will dry-up the Euphrates to "...prepare the way for the kings of the east...", and He will use the unclean spirits to, "...go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty." (Revelation. 16:12/14). God will, "...assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them..." (Zephaniah 3:8). He, "...will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you and your whole army..." (Ezekiel 38:4). In doing so He will bring them to the "valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). This is not a place where man will decide when to fight God. It is the place where God has already decided where to execute man. On that day the armies of the world will be drawn to a place to wage war on Jesus. They will feel confident and strong in their satan-led effort, but they will soon be surprised to find their gathering is not the result of superior tactical maneuvers, but is instead a deadly trap. They will have come to Israel with the intent to take possession of her, but their hopes will be dashed to pieces on that day, "...when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves." (Zechariah 12:3).

This will be the time, "When I destroy all mankind on the face of the earth." (Zephaniah 1:3b).

And with that context let's now see the much anticipated Battle of Armageddon.

17. "And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God 18. so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small." 19. Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20. But the beast was captured, and with it the false-prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two

of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."

17. "And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God..."

By this point in the Tribulation man will have no excuse. In addition to the offered grace of the 144,000, the Two Witnesses, the testimony of the Tribulation Saints, and the clear gospel message of the Proclaiming Angel, there will be other angelic warnings:

- In chapter 10, a "...mighty angel..." with a voice "...like the roar of a lion..." proclaimed, "...There will be no more delay!" (Revelation 10:3-6).
- Then in chapter 14 two more angels announce the coming destruction of Babylon through the cup of God's wrath. (Revelation 14:8-10)
- Then the angels with sickles and the one controlling fire will declare the gathering of the grain and grapes for the final harvest of the earth. (Revelation 14:1-20).
- Seven angels will pour God's Bowls of final judgment on man. (Revelation 16).
- An angel with great authority will illuminate the earth with his splendor and lead the heavenly host in a praise of destruction as he announces the judgment of the antichrist's pagan religion and his empire as another angel illustrates the power of Christ's coming like a boulder thrown into the sea. (Revelation. 18:21).

Now we see an angel "...standing in the sun...", reminiscent of the angel "...coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God." (Revelation 7:2-3). The fact he is standing in the sun may indicate he appears prior to the fifth Bowl when the "...kingdom was plunged into darkness..." (Revelation 16:10). But unlike the angel in chapter 7 who held back judgment, this new angel prepares for the final battle as he calls together the birds of the air. Bringing them to the "...great supper of God...". A supper that stands in absolute conflict with the supper we saw earlier, "...the wedding supper of the Lamb..." (Revelation 19:9). One is a gathering of the righteous to celebrate the joining of Christ and His bride, the church of faithful believers. There the groom and bride invite their guests to feast with them. The second supper is a gathering of the unrighteous to be destroyed. Their invited guests will not be God's faithful to dine at Christ's table, but will be the birds of the air to dine on the corpses of the unfaithful.

18. "...so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

None will be spared. From rulers and leaders, to free and slave, prospering and poor, the birds will gather to eat the flesh of millions who will be slain by Jesus. "...Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth..." (Ezekiel 39:17-18a). Ezekiel speaks of the godless dead as sacrifices, "...as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls - all of them fattened animals from Bashan. At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are glutted and drink blood till you are drunk." (Ezekiel 39:18b-19). This is symbolic of a sacrifice made for the atonement of sin. But since the remnant of mankind will refuse the sacrifice of the Lamb to forgive their sins, they will pay eternally by sacrificing their own lives.

19. "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army."

And finally they come. The antichrist and his rulers will be lured from around the world into a deadly trap. To a place where their intention is to fight against God, but a place where God's plan of destruction will be fulfilled. It is the place where, "I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land." (Joel 3:2).

20. "But the beast was captured, and with it the false-prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur."

satan's prodigy, the antichrist, the most vile and sinful human who will ever live, along with his demonic counterpart, the false-prophet will be captured - not killed. A quick death is far too lenient for them. Instead, they will be captured and thrown alive into hell. Into the lake of fire. A place described by Jesus in His parable of the wheat and the weeds. A parable reflecting the end-times which His disciples did not at first understand. So Jesus explained the imagery and the prophecy, "The field is the world and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:38-43). This is hell, the final gathering place for all the unholy of all time. The place where "...the fire never goes out...". (Mark 9:43). The place where those in eternal punishment, "...will be beaten with many blows..." (Luke 12:47).

What is interesting about their capture is the apparent speed with which it will happen. The destruction of mankind will be quick but it appears that the capture of the antichrist will be immediate as Jesus quickly removes the leaders of the wicked army and casts them into hell. They are cast "...alive..." which further indicates the severity of their punishment. God does not wait for final judgment and sentencing as He will with man (Revelation. 20:11) but sentencing for these two will be immediate and eternal. In fact, they will be cast into hell long before satan. (Revelation. 20:10). At this point the antichrist's evil empire and the pagan religion he supported will have been destroyed. The wealth of his kingdom, wrought by greed and lust, will be destroyed along with his "Kings", "Merchants" and "Sea Captains". All of those who led and prospered from evil will be gone. Babylon the religion and Babylon the empire will seek to exist forever.

21. "The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh."

We often think of the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11) as a trial where Jesus will cast judgment on man's soul, but in reality it is not a judgment at all - it is their final sentencing. Man's trial is essentially at his death. It is then, based on his acceptance or rejection of God's grace through Christ, that man enters into the presence of God or the absence of God. Those who know Christ will be raised in the "...first resurrection...", (Luke 14:14 / 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and those who died in rejection will be raised at the "...second resurrection..." at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. (Revelation 20:5). The climactic

end at Armageddon will be a quick trial and execution. The Great White Throne Judgment will then be their final and eternal sentencing.

The judgment actions of Christ will be swift and complete. "I will bring such distress on all people and they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like dung." (Zephaniah 1:17). And at that moment all unrepentant humanity will be gone. Every breath extinguished, every heartbeat silenced. But why? Very simply, because mankind will have rejected every offer of God's free gift of grace. It will be, "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthew 24:37), a time when, "...every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." (Genesis 6:5). A time like it was in the days of Lot when, "...fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:29 / Genesis 19:24). But mankind has always had a simple remedy to avoid this day. A remedy provided by God, in His word, on the cross and through the blood of the spotless Lamb. Long before Jesus will return to destroy mankind He came to save mankind. This is such a tragic ending because it could have been avoided if man would simply believe in the saving grace of Christ Jesus. But God knows he will not. Inevitably man will follow after his pagan beliefs, immoral attitude and earthly lusts even though he will be given every opportunity not to.

That is why it is so important for us to share the gospel and, "Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire..." (Jude 23).

LESSON 94

Revelation - chapter 20 Introduction to the Kingdom

Looking Ahead to Chapter 20:

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-10 KJV)

The Millennial Kingdom is another hotly debated topic in the Book of Revelation, but frankly I don't understand why. To me the chronology of the Millennial Kingdom in chapter 20 fits logically and contextually between the return of Christ in chapter 19 and the New Heaven and New Earth in chapter 21. Between those milestones is a one-thousand year period where the victorious Christ will reign on earth. The purpose and existence of the Kingdom is spread throughout the Bible and is a common theme in both Christian and Jewish conservative theology. But unfortunately the debate continues, so the purpose of this lesson is to give us a solid scriptural basis for the Kingdom and its chronology.

Several times in our lessons we've touched on the three primary views of the Millennial Kingdom, but let's do a quick review so we can better understand the approach to take in our study:

- Premillennialism - Premillennialists believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. They do not believe chapter 20, and supporting scripture is figurative, but means exactly what it says. They believe the Millennial Kingdom is an actual one-thousand year period immediately after the Tribulation when Christ will return to the earth to reign in Jerusalem on the throne of David. It is called "Pre" millennialism because Christ will return before (pre) the thousand year period starts. Until that time they believe the moral and spiritual condition of the earth will get worse and worse until wickedness comes to an extreme state during the last seven year Tribulation period.
- Postmillennialism - they believe the one-thousand year period is more symbolic and does not really represent a literal thousand year period of time. Unlike the Premillennialist who believe mankind will get worse and worse, the Postmillennialist believe it will get better and better. They believe the "church" will spread the gospel to the point they will control governments, education and infrastructure until the Kingdom is established and Christ will return at the end to take His faithful to heaven. There are two obvious problems with this position. First, Postmillennialist discount the scriptural basis that predicts mankind will get worse until the end. Obviously their desire for the church to conquer the world and usher in the Kingdom, while admirable, is not proving itself to be possible. The other problem is a Postmillennialist view does not adhere to a strict literal interpretation of the Bible. That approach is always a dangerous path to take.
- Amillennialism - whereas the Premillennialist believes the world will get worse and the Postmillennialist believes it will get better, the Amillennialist believes the world will not change. They contend the Kingdom is already here, in the church age, and this is as good as it's going to get. They believe there's no future Kingdom at all, no thousand years, no throne, no reign, no fulfillment of hundreds of Kingdom prophecies. In fact, they basically adhere to no literal interpretation of what the Bible actually says.

For the purpose of our study we will assume the Premillennialist viewpoint. To me that's the only position that makes sense scripturally. The Bible speaks of a distinct period of time - one-thousand

years - (in Latin Mille + Annum or one thousand). It doesn't say "a long time" or "many years", it specifically says one-thousand years. If we discount the literal interpretation of that figure then what do we do with creation in 7 days, 40 days and 40 nights of rain, 40 years in the wilderness, 12 apostles, 3 days in the tomb, 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets, 7 Bowls, 1,260 days? If we believe in a literal interpretation of those Biblical quantifiers then we must believe in a literal interpretation of one-thousand years. Also, and unfortunately, there is no foreseeable chance of the world getting better and better as the Postmillennialist believe, but, we can see firsthand it's also not staying the same as the Amillennialism contend. Lastly, both Postmillennialism and Amillennialism focus on the end-times role of the church with ever-increasing power. But as we have seen over and over in Revelation, the church does not gain end-times superiority but is Raptured at the point Christ's judgment begins. We have also seen that God's primary focus of the Tribulation is to bring His chosen nation Israel back into obedience and not to improving the world before Jesus returns. Given all that, I personally see no scriptural basis for anything but a Premillennialist view of the kingdom. Particularly given the clear and logical choreography of chapter 20 in Revelation and the wealth of prophetic scripture pointing to a time when Christ will reign on earth.

So to help us see where the thousand year Kingdom fits in the overall Revelation timeline let's quickly review its place in chronology:

- At a God-defined moment in the future the church of true born-again believers, the bride of Christ, will be Raptured and taken into heaven by Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:16) to the place prepared for the bride by the Groom. (John 14:3).
- This will be followed by a seven year period called the Tribulation, or "The Seventieth (70) Week of Daniel". During this time an evil empire will be established by the antichrist to control mankind through a global government, economy, military and religion. Yet for a time God will continue to spread the gospel until mankind turns completely sinful and rejects Him entirely. This period will include twenty-one Seal, Trumpet and Bowl judgments God will use to punish mankind, but it is also the time when Israel will finally accept Jesus as the Messiah (Daniel 9:25-27 / Zechariah 12:10 / Revelation 12:6).
- Near the end of the seven-year Tribulation Christ will release seven Bowl judgments. These will bring horrific punishment on the remnant of mankind but will also begin to reshape the earth in preparation for the return of Christ. Jesus will then return at His Second-Coming. But rather than coming as the Lamb to offer grace and healing He will come as the Warrior King to bring judgment and death. His judgement culminates in the Battle of Armageddon. (Revelation 19:11-21).
- At the end of the seven-year Tribulation Christ will bind satan in the abyss where he will remain for a thousand years. Jesus will remain on earth where He will reign supreme during His one-thousand years Millennial Kingdom.
- At the end of the Millennial Kingdom Christ will administer the Great White Throne Judgment, cast satan and all non-believers into an eternity in hell, destroy the existing sin scarred heavens and the earth, and create an eternal Kingdom for His followers. (Revelation 20:11-22:5).

Now, with that introduction, and before we unpack verse 1, let's look at the scriptural basis for the Millennial Kingdom itself. Although there are dozens of verses we could cite these will give us the foundational truths we need:

- Jesus spoke of the Kingdom many times, but in the story of the rich man He provides a very clear prophecy of what will occur, "Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all

things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28).

- The throne Jesus spoke of is the same throne He promised to the church at Laodicea if they would repent, "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne..." (Revelation 3:21).
- It is the same throne seen by John in his future view of the Kingdom., "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge." (Revelation 20:4).
- It is the throne of David in Israel prophesied by Samuel, who gives us a view of the eternal Kingdom throne of Christ, "When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:12-16).
- This is the forever throne established when David was king of Israel, but also speaking of the eternal throne from which Christ will reign, "And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:6-7).
- This will be the time when Jesus will rule on earth as a righteous judge, over a Kingdom that reflects His holy presence, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:1-9).
- The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the same time when he proclaimed, "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior." (Jeremiah 23:5-6).
- In his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream Daniel told him of the kingdoms of the earth who would rise and fall, but then he prophesied of a coming Kingdom, and future reign that would never be overthrown, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever." (Daniel 2:44).

- Daniel expanded on this vision in chapter 7, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like the son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His kingdom is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. " (Daniel 7:13-14).

There are so many more passages we could include. Zechariah talks about Jesus replenishing Israel with living water flowing out of Jerusalem when, "The Lord will be king over the whole earth." (Zechariah 14:9). Joel speaks of the time when Jesus will, "...dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her. In that day the mountains will drip with new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; and all the ravines of Judah will run with water." (Joel 3:17-18). And Zephaniah speaks of the day of judgment when Israel will be redeemed and praise their Messiah, "Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm." (Zephaniah 3:14-15). This is a time spoken of so often by the prophets. A time when the remnant of Israel is restored, a time when the Groom rules with His bride, a time, "...for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." (Acts 3:21). A time, at the end when God will, "...put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment - to bring unity to all things in heaven and on the earth under Christ." (Ephesians 1:10). Clearly, this is a time when Jesus will reign. A time when unity will be established by Jesus. Not by the church and not by Israel, but by Jesus. The one on whose shoulders the government will rest. (Isaiah 9:6).

As we move forward through the rest of Revelation let us find joy and strength in the fact the Lord's Kingdom will come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

LESSON 95

Revelation Chapter 20, Verses 1:3

Quick Recap:

I truly hope our last gave you a solid scriptural foundation for a premillennial view of the future thousand year reign of Christ on earth. To me it's the only position that makes sense:

- In Revelation the Kingdom is placed chronologically and logically between the return of Christ in chapter 19 and the New Heaven and New Earth in chapter 21.
- A Postmillennialist view assumes the world will get better and better until Christ returns. Whereas an Amillennialist view assumes the current church age is the Kingdom and Christ will return when He is ready. Both views contend that God's focus is on the power of the church - which effectively discounts the end-times role of Israel - and neither accept a literal interpretation of scripture.
- So for the purpose of our study we will assume a literal view of scripture just as it is written. A view that Christ will return before (pre) establishing a one-thousand year Kingdom on earth. That position follows a scripturally based chronologically:
 - The church will be Raptured prior to the start of God's end-times judgment. Jesus will gather us in the air but not come to the earth. (1 Thessalonians 4:16).
 - This will be followed by a seven year period called the Tribulation. During this period God will strike the earth and mankind with twenty-one judgment actions called the seven Seals, seven Trumpets and seven Bowls.
 - Near the end of the seven year Tribulation Christ Jesus will return at His "Second-Coming" to destroy the remnant of sinful humanity. (Revelation 19:11).
 - He will then establish an earthly Kingdom where He will reign supreme with His glorified bride and all believers.
 - His earthly reign will last one thousand years. A "millennium" in Latin.
 - At the end of the thousand years Jesus will sentence satan and all of his followers to eternity in hell.
 - God will then create an eternal Kingdom. A New Heaven, a New Earth and a New Jerusalem.

Now, given that chronologically I want to interject one more verse to help bring even more clarity to the timing of the Kingdom. Through scripture we have confirmed the Tribulation will last seven years. This period is then divided into two phases of three-and-a-half years each. That's important for us to understand because it is at the midpoint of the Tribulation when the antichrist will go into the temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God. This is "The Abomination That Causes Desolation " (Matthew 24:15 / Daniel 9:27), which appears to start the second half of the Tribulation. This second three-and-a-half year period is known by several names: "Times, time and half a time" (Daniel 12:7), 42 months (Revelation 11:2), and 1,260 days (Revelation 12:6); all of which equal three-and-a-half years. The end of the second three-and-a-half year period (the second 1,260 days) is the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns. That said, according to Daniel there is a short period of time after the end of the Tribulation and before the start of the Kingdom. "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end

of 1,335 days." (Daniel 12:11-12). So, if the second half of the Tribulation lasts 1,260 days then what does 1,290 (30 more days) and 1,335 (45 more days) mean?

Let's break this down a bit...Daniel 9:27b gives us an explanation for the first part of verse 11, "In the middle of the seven [the three-and-a-half year point] he [the antichrist] will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple [in Jerusalem] he will set up an abomination that causes desolation until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." - In other words, at the beginning of the Tribulation the antichrist will form a treaty with Israel, allow them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and reinstate the levitical sacrifice. (Daniel 9:27a). But then, at the middle of the seven year period he will break the treaty with Israel, go into the temple, declare himself to be God and put an image of himself in the temple. This action is called an "abomination" that desecrates or desolates the temple. (Revelation 13:14-15 / Matthew 24:15 / 2 Thessalonians 2:4). That explains the part of the verse, "...From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up...". But where does that leave the additional 30 and 45 days? A total of 75 additional days? Scholars have mixed opinions but most believe it provides time for specific preparations for entering the Kingdom.

These include:

- The restoration of Israel - who will have been trampled on by the Gentiles for 42 months, which is 1,260 days (Revelation 11:2).
- The regathering of Israel's remnant who will have been hidden in the wilderness for 1,260 days. (Revelation 12:6&14).
- The blessing of those who were saved during the Tribulation and made it to the end. (Daniel 12:12).
- Or, the judgment of sinful nations with unrepentant survivors who did not come to the aid of the "...least of these..." - the hungry, thirsty, unclothed and imprisoned of Israel. This is indicated by the separation of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 which seems to take place just after Christ assumes His role as the earthly Judge, but prior to the Great White Throne Judgment a thousand years later, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the Angel's with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (Matthew 25:31-32).

Now with that context lets dig deeper into the glorious Kingdom of God.

1. "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time."

1. "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain."

1.a. - "And I saw..."

Several times in Revelation John uses the term "...I saw...". This indicates more than "...I thought...", or "...I imagined...". The term John uses requires action and indicates a physical nature of what he sees. Interestingly in chapter 20 John uses the term five times as he walks us through a description of the Kingdom. Each use highlights something he wants us to pay particular attention to.

1.b. - "...an angel coming down out of heaven..."

Here John will see another angel. The Bible doesn't tell us who the angel is. He may be one of the judgment angels mentioned throughout Revelation, or he may be a new angel. Either way, he is "...coming down out of heaven..." which indicates he will be given a very special task from God.

1.c. - "...having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain."

The angel's task is significant. He has been given a key, "klein" in Greek, a term that indicates he has great authority and power. He also has a "...great chain...", "halysin" in Greek which means a type of physical capture and bonding, like a manacle or handcuff. Interestingly it is seen as a "...great..." chain indicating the extreme force required to restrain satan. In comparison let's think about the demon possessed man at Gerasenes that Jesus cast into swine. (Luke 8:26-39). The man had been "...chained hand and foot and kept under guard...", but with the demon's power he broke the chains. The name of this powerful demon was, "Legion", indicating more than one demon working together. In fact, Matthew's version quotes the demon using the identifier "us" when talking to Jesus. (Matthew 8:31). But as powerful as they may have been, Jesus brought them out of the man and cast them into a herd of pigs. - Now in Revelation this angel has a similar task but with a much more formidable foe.

2. "He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or satan, and bound him for a thousand years."

2.a. - "He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or satan..."

John's description leaves no doubt who the foe is. He is the serpent who tempted Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:1), the "...enormous red dragon...", and "...that ancient serpent called the devil, or satan, who leads the whole world astray." (Revelation 12:3 and 9). The term "...seized...", "ekratesen" in Greek means to grasp or to hold fast. It gives a sense of the action taken by the angel to subdue satan. The Bible doesn't say why this one angel was able to capture satan. In chapter 12 the archangel Michael and his whole army fought satan in heaven and satan had the power to fight back. (Revelation 12:7-8). Also, in Daniel 10 we saw a battle between Gabriel and "...the prince of the Persian kingdom..." - either satan or a powerful demonic angel - that lasted twenty-one days and ended only when Michael "...came to help me..." (Daniel 10:13). But here in Revelation satan is subdued and bound with no indication of a fight or any resistance. The angel seizes satan and binds him in chains. Maybe this indicates the condition of satan at that moment. By this point Jesus will have returned as the Almighty Warrior King. He will have slain the antichrist, the false prophet and their followers. He will have destroyed Babylon the pagan religion and Babylon the evil seat of power. He will have vindicated His holy Name and removed sin from the earth. Surely that victory over satan would leave him weakened.

2.b. - "...and bound him for a thousand years."

Here is another reference to a one-thousand year period of time. It doesn't say "...for a long time...". It says "...for a thousand years...". To me this continues to discount the Postmillennialist view that one-thousand years is figurative, and it certainly discounts the Amillennialist view that we're in the Kingdom today. Why is that impossible? Just look around. Does it look to you like satan is already bound?

3. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time."

3.a. - "He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him...",

Here is where a study of the original Greek really brings depth to its meaning. The term "...threw...", "ebalen" in Greek is translated to cast or throw with force and purpose. The angel didn't simply drop satan into the abyss or push him over the edge. He purposely threw him with force into the pit. Adding to this sense of determined action is the word "...seal...", "esphragism" in Greek, which means to officially close something as with a signet ring. Just as an official document would be sealed and only reopened by one with authority, here the angel has been directed by God to forcefully throw satan into the abyss and then seal it with God's authority.

3.b. - "...to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended."

For a time the earth will be without the influence of sin. satan will be sealed by God's authority so that neither a thought or inclination of his influence can be felt on earth. Jesus will reign and His redeemed and righteous followers will reign with Him (Revelation 20:4). During this time there will be no influence of sin. The government will be on Christ's shoulders (Isaiah 9:6) and mankind will live in a world ruled by Jesus. There will be no war, no hunger, no strife, no fear, no crime. There will be a glorious King of kings who leads all honest rulers, righteous leaders, accurate media and world-wide prosperity. For a time, it will truly be the Kingdom of God.

3.c. - "After that, he must be set free for a short time."

But...satan was thrown into the abyss, but not hell. The abyss is like a holding cell where prisoners are kept prior to sentencing. All others held in torment will be resurrected and sentenced at the Great White Throne Judgment, but one prisoner will be released for a short time. Later in chapter 20 we'll find out why.

LESSON 96

Revelation Chapter 20, Verses 4-6

Quick Recap:

As we discussed preparations will be made for the thousand year earthly reign of Christ. In verse 1 a powerful angel with great authority will seize satan, bind him in chains and literally throw him into the Abyss. This is a place of demonic incarceration where demons are kept in bondage until final sentencing to hell. Peter spoke of it, "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment..." (2 Peter 2:4). Jude mentioned it as well, "And the Angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling - these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the great Day." (Jude 6). It is the place from where the swarm of locust demons were released at the fifth Trumpet, "...like the smoke from a gigantic furnace...". (Revelation 9:2). A place led by a powerful demon, "...as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer). (Revelation 9:11). Undoubtedly, the Abyss must be a terrible place where even demons do not want to go. We see this when Jesus cast the legion demons into swine at Gerasenes, "...they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss." (Luke 8:31).

Now in chapter 20 we see the establishment of Christ's earthly Kingdom, but first satan will be cast into the Abyss to remove his influence from the world. There he will be temporarily sealed away from man for a thousand years until he, his demons and all of his unredeemed followers will be sentenced to hell, "...into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41).

With the removal of satan and the coronation of Christ, the world, at least for a time, will become a place of righteousness. Christ will physically reign on earth, aided by us, the redeemed, who will be there with Him. Justice will prevail and the "Fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22) will be the very intent of every man's heart. The earth and its people will be as they were prior to the fall, when in God's righteous image, man walked with the Lord in the garden. It will be a time spoken of by Zechariah who described life under the divine rule in Christ's Kingdom as a time when, "...many people and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and entreat him." (Zechariah 8:22 – you should read the whole chapter). Joel speaks of the time when Jesus will be in Israel and, "You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God...". (Joel 2:26). This is the time when, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together..." (Isaiah 11:6). It will be a time when, "I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety. I will make them and the places surrounding my hill a blessing. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. The trees will yield fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in the land." (Ezekiel 34:25-27). In another beautiful prophecy given to Ezekiel the Lord says, "...this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. There I will live among the Israelites forever." (Ezekiel 43:7). How on earth could anyone read these passages of scripture and believe the church has replaced Israel as God's chosen people? They will not be replaced. Instead they

will be the fulfillment of God's promise, "And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed." (2 Samuel 7:10). Some declare this promise applies to an earlier age and since then the church has supplanted Israel as God's chosen people and messengers to the world. But they fail to recognize God's eternal promise, "...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (2 Samuel 7:13). This is speaking of a "...forever..." throne. A throne of David, a Jew, in Israel. The throne of Jesus in His future Kingdom; in Israel. This is the throne the writer of Hebrew cited, "But about the Son he says, "Your throne. O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom..." (Hebrews 1:8). We must also remember that God designated the time of the end-times Tribulation as a time for Israel. As Gabriel told Daniel, the seven year period, "...are decreed for your people [Daniel's people Israel] and your holy city [Jerusalem] to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring my everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place." (Daniel 9:24). This is the time when the remnant of Israel will "...look on the one they pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child..." (Zechariah 12:10b). The time when Jesus will, "...pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication." (Zechariah 12:10a). This is the time we see in chapter 20 when Israel, the bride and all other believers reign with Christ in His earthly rule. It is the time when everyone will seek the face of Christ on His throne. When, "In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of their robe and say, "Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you. " (Zechariah 8:23). And when that happens Israel will finally be the messengers of God.

Please don't let anyone sway you away from that truth. The current focus on "Replacement Theology", "Kingdom Theology" and "Dominion Theology" is unbiblical because all of them contend the church has somehow replaced Israel. As good as that may sound to some Gentiles it is not supported by scripture. What is supported is the fact that Israel - though currently fallen away - "...is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. There I will live among the Israelites forever." (Ezekiel 43:7). --- And when God says forever, He means forever.

Now let's unpack verses 4-6.

4. "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years."

4. "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

4.a. -"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge..."

As with verse 1 John gives substance to his vision with the term, "...I saw...", and draws our minds to the next phase of things he sees - "...thrones..." As we've discussed before the term throne can have two meanings. One is a literal seat, like the physical throne of a king. The other indicates the seat of power and regal authority. Here in verse 4 it may mean both. John may see literal thrones in heaven but it also indicates the position of, "...those who had been given authority to judge." So who are these?

- When Jesus spoke to the church at Laodicea he admonished the lukewarm congregation to repent or He will, "...spit you out of my mouth...". But for those who would repent Jesus promised they would be victorious and "...sit with me on my throne..." (Revelation 3:21).
- In Revelation chapter 4 we were introduced to a group called the Twenty-Four Elders. For reasons we discussed in our prior lessons, these arguably represent the raptured church. They are first seen by John as, "...twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were Twenty-Four Elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads." (Revelation 4:4).
- When Jesus was speaking to His disciples about the future Kingdom He promised them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). Clearly He is speaking of the Kingdom when, "...the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through the holy prophets." (Acts 3:21).

4.b. - "...And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands."

In chapter 13 we saw reference to these same believers. They are the Tribulation Saints who will come to Christ during the seven year Tribulation period. They are also those who will be killed for refusing to take the "...mark..." of the beast and for refusing to worship him. (Revelation 13:15-17). They will be the great multitude standing before the throne of God and praising His name. Those who, "...have come out of the great Tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-17).

4.c. - "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

Those saved during the Tribulation will have missed the Rapture. Now at the inauguration of the Kingdom they too will be resurrected and given a glorified body.

5. "(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection."

But "... the rest of the dead..."; those who have died unredeemed since time began will not be raised during the Rapture and will not be raised at the beginning of the Kingdom. They will be raised at the end of the Kingdom and ushered before Christ at the final Great White Throne Judgment. There they will be sentenced and cast into hell. Sadly they will miss the "...first resurrection...", either at the Rapture or the Kingdom, and will be raised at the bitter end.

6. "Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years." Redeemed believers will be raised at the Rapture which is before the Tribulation. Then those saved and martyred during the Tribulation will be raised at the start of the Kingdom. This is the "...first resurrection...". We, the redeemed, will only die once. A physical death but not a spiritual

death because we will exist with God forever. The unredeemed however will die a "...second death..." One that is physical, but another that is spiritual. This is when they will be resurrected, sentenced and thrown into hell. The "...second death..." spiritually removes them from the presence of God, from which they will never be resurrected.

But those of us who are saved will enter His Kingdom as His righteous and redeemed, "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession..." (1 Peter 2:9). There we "...will reign with him a thousand years."

LESSON 97

This Weeks Lesson, Revelation Chapter 20, Verses 7-10

Quick Recap:

In the first 6 verses of chapter 20 we saw an amazing sight. After Jesus' victory at the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21) an angel will come down from heaven, bind satan in chains and throw him into the Abyss. That action will remove satan's influence from the world and initiate the one-thousand year Millennial Kingdom of Christ. John then looked into heaven and saw thrones; the seat of authority for those who will reign with Christ. He spoke of one of those groups, the amazing Tribulation Saints who came to Christ during the Tribulation but, "...had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." He then spoke of two resurrections. The first will include the pre-Tribulational believers resurrected at the Rapture, Old Testament believers, plus those who had been martyred during the Tribulation and resurrected at the beginning of the Millennium. These groups plus those who were saved during the Tribulation but did not die will enter into Christ's Kingdom. The remainder of humanity, everyone who did not accept God's grace of salvation during their earthly life, will be resurrected at the end of the Millennium to stand before God for their final sentencing. This is the time spoken of by Daniel when, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake. Some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2).

Then near the end of the Millennial Kingdom, but just before the Great White Throne Judgment, another event must happen. An event that is difficult to understand, but an event that will nonetheless occur.

Now with that context let's see what that next event will bring...

7. "When the thousand years are over, satan will be released from his prison. 8. and will go out and deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9. They marched across the breath of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false-prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

7. " When the thousand years are over, satan will be released from his prison..."

First off, this verse further supports a literal interpretation of a thousand year reign of Christ. The text does not say "after a long time", but clearly stipulates a specific number of years.

Then comes a statement so profound it's meaning is difficult to clearly understand, "...satan will be released from his prison..." As unusual as that may sound, Jesus will release satan for a short period of time. He will return from his thousand year incarceration in full fury because he will have one last chance to influence man to turn away from God.

8. "...and will go out and deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore."

8.a. - . "...and will go out and deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth..."

So who are the nations (people groups) who can still be deceived during the earthly reign of Jesus? It can't be the unredeemed people who previously populated the earth during the Tribulation because they will have all been destroyed and not resurrected until the Great White Throne Judgment. (Revelation. 19:21 / 20:12 / Matthew. 25: 31-32). And it can't be any of the various groups of redeemed saints. So given that, who will be on earth at the end of the Millennium who are still unsaved and where will they come from? Let's consider several sources:

- Most of those saved during the Tribulation will be killed for refusing to worship the beast, but it appears there will be some who survive and enter the Kingdom alive. (Revelation 13:15 / 18:4).
- These may be the "sheep" who will be separated from the goats at the end of the Tribulation. (Matthew 25:31-36).
- They may be the ones held in prison (Revelation 13:10).
- Or maybe some of those sold as human slaves, (Revelation 18:13).
- Or maybe some of those "...who can withstand it?..." (Revelation 6:17).
- Or the remnant of Israel held secure for 1,260 days. (Revelation 12:14).

In any case, there will be people who survive in human bodies and repopulate the earth during the thousand years. These will be the offspring of those who were saved during the Tribulation, escaped death by the antichrist and entered the Kingdom in earthly bodies. These people and their descendants will have children during the thousand years. Children who will grow up under the divine reign of Christ on earth and physically see His glory. Undoubtedly many of these will be saved during the thousand years, but as difficult as it may seem, some percentage of them will reject Jesus as their King.

But how can that be? How can people born under the righteous earthly rule of Jesus turn away from Him? Well, let's think back and ask ourselves...

- How could Adam and Eve turn against God when they walked with Him in the garden? (Genesis 3:6-7).
- How could Israel turn against God when they saw the sea parted, manna from heaven, a cloud in the day and the pillar of fire at night? (Exodus 32:4).
- How could religious leaders crucify the Messiah when He performed miracles and fulfilled prophecies right before their eyes? (Luke 23:23).
- How can denominations today demean the holy sacrifice of Christ on the cross by viewing salvation as the result of works or church sacraments?

Obviously unrepentant man will be no different during the earthly reign of Jesus than they have been in the past. They will be raised on an earth with the physical presence of God, just as Adam and Eve were, but like those two, future man will also fail. Keep in mind, much of the world's population during the Kingdom will be righteous and unable to sin -- the Old Testament saints, the raptured church, redeemed Israel and the Tribulation saints. They will enter the Kingdom in their resurrection bodies and therefore will be unable to procreate. (1 Thessalonians 4:13 / 1 Corinthians 15:52-54 / Revelation 20:4). But there will be others who were saved during the Tribulation but did not die. They will still be human, and not in a glorified body, and therefore able to populate the Kingdom. But just because their offspring will be born during the reign of Christ does not mean they will automatically be saved. Just like premillennial

humans, they will have to come to Jesus by their own faith and accept him as their Lord. The prophet Micah speaks of a time when those on earth will seek Christ, "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Micah 4:1-2). Likewise, the Psalmist speaks of such a time as this, "May the people praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the people with equity and guide the nations of the earth." (Psalms 67:3-4) "God reigns over the nations: God is seated on his throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted." (Psalms 47:8-9). This will be a time when satan's influence and temptations will be removed, but Kingdom dwellers will still have to accept or reject Jesus in order to be saved. Although it seems unbelievable that people raised on earth during Christ's physical reign could ever rebel against Him, history teaches us that's exactly what they will do. Just as others have done they will see Christ in-flesh and turn their backs on Him. Sadly, even though they will live under the rule of Jesus they will still be human and still have a sin nature. During that time satan will be removed, but as soon as he returns and begins to tempt man into sin, many will fall. Not because they will not "know" Christ, but because their hearts will be unrepentant and they will not truly accept Him as their Lord. This so clearly illustrates what we see in Matthew 7:21-23; that to "know" who Jesus is does not make Him your Savior.

8.b. - "...- Gog and Magog - ..."

Gog and Magog is a very misunderstood term and unfortunately is often the topic of social media end-times hysteria. Magog was the grandson of Noah and the son of Japheth. (Genesis 10:2). Gog may have been the name of an ancient leader of the Magog people. They were a group who settled in a region around the Black and Caspian Seas. They are also thought to be the ancestors of the "Sythians". Gog and Magog are mentioned in Ezekiel as the chief prince of Meshek and Tubal. Two of the groups -- possibly representing people from modern day Turkey -- who will come against Israel in the "Ezekiel Wars". (Ezekiel chapter 38-39). But here in Revelation the terms Gog and Magog probably represent all enemies of God. These are the people who will be influenced by the returning satan to come against Jesus and His people at the end of the Millennium. - So sad.

8.c. - "...and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore."

The term "...like the sand in the seashore...", is used in the Bible to represent a very large number. "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore." (Genesis 22:17). In other words, so many they cannot be counted. (Genesis 32:12). We don't know how many people will be in the Kingdom after a thousand years but undoubtedly in the millions or possibly billions, particularly if they live to old age and reproduce longer. To give us some perspective, the earth's population has grown from 2 billion in 1900 to almost 8 billion today and current birth rates are about 140 million per year. Of course you can't apply those stats to a world being repopulated but it at least gives us a perspective on how quickly the world's population can grow. What is so sad about the Millennial period is the fact an uncountable number of people will turn against Jesus even though they can see Him and learn directly from Him. There may be no better illustration than of this the depravity of man and the power of satan.

9. "They marched across the breath of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them."

9.a. - "They marched across the breath of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves."

They will come from all nations and all regions and they will come for one purpose; to fight against Jesus, His people and Jerusalem; the "...Throne of the Lord..." (Jeremiah 3:17 / Psalms 78:68 / 87:2). You would think they would have learned from the past. From the stories told of Armageddon when another satan-led army came against Jesus at Jerusalem and were totally annihilated. Or maybe they will be warned by the redeemed living on earth? But they will come anyway. Like Eve reaching for the fruit, like the rescued Hebrews making a golden calf or like the arrogant Jewish leaders offering 30 pieces of silver for the death of their King, mankind will turn their backs on Jesus, follow their sin-ridden hearts and seek to destroy the One who loves them the most.

9.b. - "But fire came down from heaven and devoured them."

But this time God's destruction will come quickly. No prelude, no twenty-one judgments, no last warnings. Man will be destroyed by the breath of God. As the Lord, "...rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heaven." (Genesis 19:24). And as He did with Elijah, "Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men." (2 Kings 1:12). But why must this happen? Why will the descendants of the Tribulation survivors, who live in the sight of Christ turn against Him? Because all unredeemed man must be destroyed before God's New Heaven and New Earth can be created. These will be the last remnant of unrepentant man. Those who will have seen and heard and still not believed.

10. "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false-prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

The antichrist and the false-prophet were already destroyed and thrown into hell. (Revelation 19:20), but now satan himself, released for a short time to root-out the final vestige of unbelievers will be recaptured and thrown into the final hell. The "...eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41).

LESSON 98

Revelation, Chapter 20, Verses 11-15

Quick Recap:

This lesson will conclude our study of God's judgment actions in Revelation. From chapter 6 through chapter 20 we took a verse by verse journey through the Tribulation. These chapters explain the holy judgments of God - the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls - the Millennial Kingdom, and the post-millennial destruction of satan's unexpected followers, Gog and Magog. The first twenty-one of God's judgments will occur during the seven year Tribulation and the last, technically a twenty-second judgement, will occur at the end of the thousand year Kingdom when the final remnant of sinful mankind will be burned away. Yet during most of that time, and in parallel with His most severe judgments, God will continue to offer mercy and grace to anyone who will accept. He will do that through 144,000 Jewish evangelists, Two Witnesses, a Proclaiming Angel and the testimony of those who will come to Him during that time of great trial. And many will come. Despite almost certain persecution and death, multitudes will defy the antichrist and come to Jesus. But even so, the majority of people on the earth will grow further and further from God until a time when all who are left will be totally depraved by sin. Jesus will then return in a much-anticipated event known as the "Second-Coming". With Him will be His raptured church (us, His "bride"), and the angelic hosts of heaven. Facing Him will be the antichrist, the false-prophet and their hordes of wicked leaders and followers, who under the command of satan will seek to destroy Jesus. Instead, they will be destroyed. On the vast Plains of Megiddo the Warrior King will swing His sickle and reap the earth until His enemy's blood runs deep and wide across the land of Israel. During that battle both the antichrist and the false-prophet will be destroyed along with "Mystery Babylon" the antichrist's pagan religion and his demonic empire, "Babylon the great".

Christ's victory at Armageddon will bring the Tribulation to a close. Jesus will then establish His earthly Kingdom that will last a thousand years. This will be inaugurated by the capture of satan who will be, bound and imprisoned in the darkness of the Abyss. This will result in a time on earth when his evil influence and temptation will be completely removed. Christ's Kingdom will then flourish, populated by the raptured and glorified redeemed who have returned to rule with Him, but also populated by humans, the offspring of those saved during the Tribulation but were not killed by judgment or the antichrist. This will be the time of pure peace on earth that fulfils the "Lord's Prayer"; when the name of the Lord will be hallowed and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. But then Jesus will do something totally unexpected and so difficult to understand. At the end of the thousand year Kingdom He will release satan from his prison and allow him to return to earth to deceive the repopulated nations. Unbelievably, millions of people - as numerous as the sand on the sea - will revolt. People who have lived under the physical reign of Jesus for a thousand years, and have personally seen His divine glory, will be deceived by satan and turn their back on the Lord. They will come in force as a great demonic army - Gog and Magog - the enemies of God, who will attack Jesus and Jerusalem. But God's patience will be gone and His destruction will be quick. No more judgment actions will be needed. He will simply destroy them all with the breath of His mouth - a fire that will annihilate every single one. Then satan, the author of all evil and the source of all sin, will be unceremoniously thrown into hell to suffer eternity for his disobedience to God.

Once that final battle is complete and the last vestige of man on earth comes to an end, the earthly Kingdom will come to a close end and an event will occur when the souls of all unredeemed humans will stand before the throne of God for final sentencing. This event will conclude all of God's judgment actions and put a final end to the very existence of humanity as we know it today.

Now with that context let's see the final judgment action of God.

11. "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each was judged according to what they had done. 14. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15. Anyone whose name was not found in the book was thrown into the lake of fire."

11. "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them."

11.a.- "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it."

This is the righteous bench of a righteous Judge. White, because it represents the purity of both the One seated on it and the justification of His judgment actions. Jesus, the Holy One of God, vindicated by His victory over Satan will preside over those being judged; the unrepentant sinners of all times. From Cain who slain Able to the very last human who will fall to God's post-kingdom breath, every person who died without accepting God's saving grace will be sentenced to an eternity in hell.

But who is "...him..." who sits on the throne? Is it God the Father, or God the Son, or both? Let's dig a little deeper to better understand:

- God's throne is mentioned several times in Revelation:
 - In chapters 4 and 5 John sees into the heavenly throne room of God: "...there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne." This is a view into the amazing throne room of God. It is He, the Father, seated on His throne John saw surrounded by Four Living Creatures who encircle the throne and praise the One seated on it, "Day and night they never stopped saying; 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty'" (Revelation 4:2-3 / 8). This appears to be God the Father, the Almighty, on His throne of supreme authority.
 - We see further evidence of this in chapter 5, "Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll..." "...Then I saw the Lamb looking as if it had been slain..." "He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne." (Revelation 5:1 / 6 / 7). Here we see a clear distinction between two of God's

triune roles (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). It is the Father who is on the throne and the Son - the Lamb - taking the judgement scroll from Him.

- We see this distinction again in chapter 6 when the nations call for the mountains to fall on them to end their Tribulation suffering, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Revelation 6:16).
- That same separation of roles is seen again in chapter 7, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9). These verses give us a vision of God the Father on His throne of authority and God the Son at His side. This is similar to the same scene Stephen saw just before he was stoned, "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56).

All of this speaks to God the Father in His place of authority in heaven with Jesus at His side. This shows a clear distinction between two of the three distinct roles of God. So given that, which one is, "...him who was seated on the throne..." at the final judgment? I believe it is Jesus, on the throne of judgment, not the Father on the heavenly throne of authority.

Let's explore this a bit more:

- We know the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) are one God in three roles. This is fundamental to our Christian theology and is verified in several places in scripture. I will mention just a few here: When Jesus prayed in the garden prior to His crucifixion He prayed for all believers and said, "Father, just as you are in me and I am in you..." "...that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me..." (John 17:21 /22-23). Likewise, Jesus told Philip, "...anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9). He also made this divine one-ness very clear and simple when He spoke to a group of Jewish leaders who doubted His role as the Messiah, "I and the Father are one.", removing all doubt of His divine nature. (John 10:30). Both Moses and John further clarified the multifaceted role of God in two beautiful passages that when linked together show a distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, "In the beginning God [the Father] created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God [the Holy Spirit] was hovering over the waters." - "In the beginning was the Word [the Son, Jesus], and the Word was with God [the Father and Holy Spirit], and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."..."The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (Genesis 1:2 / John 1:1-2 / 14). Clearly, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all God, but in different roles. A role that includes Jesus as the divine Judge.
- The Psalmist also speaks of God in His judgment role and differentiates between Father and Son. "The One enthroned in heaven [the Father] laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my king [the Son] on Zion, my holy mountain." (Psalms 2:4-6). Clearly, God, the ultimate supreme authority, will judge in the last days, but He will judge through the Son. Paul speaks of this delegation of roles when he says, "...you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath..."..."This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ..." (Romans 2:5 / 16). Here

again we see God the Father, the supreme authority and Judge, who delegates His earthly judgment actions to Jesus, the Son.

- But why would God the Father assign the role of man's judge to Jesus? John addresses the same question to help us understand, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,..." "...And he [the Father] has given him [the Son] authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done what is good [have accepted God's saving grace] will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. " (John 5:22 / 26 /28).

These verses leave no doubt who is on the throne of final judgment. Although the Father sits on the heavenly throne of supreme authority, it is the Son who has been granted the authority to judge mankind. Why? Because as John says, He has the, "...authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." And as the Son of Man, who came to earth and gave His life for the souls of men, it is He who will cast the final sentence over everyone who did not accept His free gift of salvation. Paul further confirms this to the church in Athens, "For he [the Father] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man [the Son] he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:31).

So this Great White Throne is not the throne in heaven; the royal seat of God's supreme authority, but is the throne of righteous judgment when Jesus administers final sentencing to the lost world. It is not a throne of rule but a throne of judgment. It is not a throne of mercy but a throne of punishment. It is a throne whose color emphasizes its purity and justice, but as Daniel saw in a much earlier vision of the same judgment event, it is the authoritative seat of the divine Judge of wrath, "His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated and the books were opened." (Daniel 7:9-10). This description of Christ's judgment seat removes any thought of it being the beautiful and jewel encrusted throne in heaven. It is beautiful only in the sense that it is here the final sentencing of all sin and sinners will be destroyed, but in reality this will be the throne of the victorious King in His final post-kingdom action of cleansing all creation of all sin. In one sense this final day of the "Day of the Lord" is wonderful because by this action God will usher in the glorious eternity for those of us who know Him as our Savior. But it is also a day of unspeakable tragedy because in the midst of the multitudes before His throne will be people we failed to witness to. --- Let's think about that.

11.b.- "The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them."

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). With this single divine act God set in motion everything we know today - the universe, earth, time, chemistry, biology and physics - all erupted at the direction of God's command. Scientists can deny this and theologians can debate this but the fact is God's actions on that day brought something from nothing. But in the end, when all that God created has been marred by sin, He will reverse creation by taking something and making it nothing. A nothing without form and void, just as it was in the beginning. Although Christ's destruction of satan and final sentencing of mankind will eliminate the source and acts of sin forever, that alone will be insufficient for preparing an eternal home for His followers. So He will also destroy the universe and the earth - all creation - to eliminate all

signs of all sin. Verse 11 clarifies that this is not some type of restoration or relocation, but is a complete annihilation because, "...there was no place for them." No place to move creation to. No opportunity to restore it to a pre-sin condition, because in order to provide an eternal home for His redeemed people nothing but perfection will do. So God will destroy everything He created; lost mankind, the earth and the entire universe. At that point creation will be gone, replaced temporarily by a dimension of existence known only to God until the New Heaven and New Earth is created (Revelation 21:1). It is within this creation void, between the old and new creations, that Christ will enact His final judgment. And where will that place be? We don't know, but it will undoubtedly be in a "place" prepared by God for this specific event.

Peter speaks of this day in a little more detail, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear in a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."..."That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:10 / 12). Isaiah was also given a similar prophecy of the same event, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies." (Isaiah 51:6). Not only does scripture indicate the heavens and the earth will be gone, but also indicates we may not remember them. Possibly because to do so would be to remember sin, but also because the New Heavens and New Earth will be so much greater than a memory of what existed before. A memory of a creation scarred by sin, "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind." (Isaiah 65:17). This whole series of scripture takes us back to Revelation chapter 6 where John explained the judgment actions of the sixth Seal to show us what will come during the Tribulation and at the destruction of all creation, "I watched as he opened the sixth Seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place." (Revelation 6:12-13). The writer of Hebrews speaks to this same event when he adds, "In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe..." (Hebrews 1:10-12). Likewise, In the Olivet Discourse Jesus - the Word who made the original creation - explains what will happen in beautiful simplicity, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Matthew 24:35).

12. "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books."

12.a. - "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne..."

And they will come to sentencing by the millions - probably billions. Every person who has ever lived on the earth and failed to accept God's gift of salvation will stand before Jesus for sentencing. It won't matter how wealthy or poor they had been in life. It won't matter how talented or beautiful. It won't matter how religious they were, or how often they went to church, or how much they read the Bible. It won't matter if they were good church members or had been baptized. All that will matter is whether or not they had accepted God's gift of grace, and sadly, everyone standing here

on that day will be there because they refused. There will be no second chance and no plea-bargaining. There will also be no trial and no jury. Their guilt was sealed the moment they died without salvation so that this event will not be a trial but will be their sentencing. Many will claim there was a mistake. They will point out how good they were, or call Jesus their Lord and tell Him all of the acts of works they did in His name; trying desperately to convince Him they were good enough to avoid His wrath. But He, "...will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers." (Matthew 7:23).

12.b.- "...and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." More than one book is mentioned here. The most important to us is the "Lamb's Book of Life" which holds the names of every person who will ever accept Christ during their lives. (Revelation 3:5 / 13.8 / 17.8). This is the book where the names of those who, "...will be delivered..." will be found. (Daniel 12:1). It is the, "...scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name." (Malachi 3:16b). But those of us who have accepted God's saving grace, and whose names are in the Lamb's book, will not stand before this throne. We will have already been raptured, glorified, taken part in the wedding supper of the Lamb and will be waiting for our appointment to God's recreated eternal home. But the other books hold the deeds of those who are not in the Lamb's book. They will be listed in the heavenly books recording every action of every man; every deed, every sin and every thought. The very intent of the unredeemed mind will be recorded in the other "...books..." These are the books Daniel spoke of that, "...were opened..." (Daniel 7:10) and presented before the Lord as a record of every lost soul. Of all the scripture in the Bible that speaks to "works" this single verse should dispel any notion that man can earn or work their way to heaven. Here, at the last moment of humanity man will be, "...judged according to what they had done." Not on what Jesus did in their place, but what they did on their own. Given this verse it boggles the mind that people and whole denominations still believe they can earn their way to heaven by their own effort and sacraments. Those things, "...they had done."

13. "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each was judged according to what they had done."

The dead will come from everywhere, from the land or the sea. They will be raised in the "second resurrection" (Revelation 20:5-6). The resurrection of the dead who are brought before Jesus for sentencing. It doesn't matter how long ago they died or what condition their earthly remains will be in. They will be raised in order to be sentenced to a life in the torments of hell. They will be raised from the earth. From the dungeon where their souls have been held until that day.

14. "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death." Death and "Hades" are both used here to represent the final death. Jesus, the divine Judge controls both, "And I hold the keys to death and hades." (Revelation 1:18). This is the state of being spiritually dead and separated from God. In the Old Testament this interim holding tank for the lost dead is called "Sheol" - the place of the dead, where man awaits His eternal fate. We see this in the story of Lazarus and the rich man who was, "In hades where he was in torment." (Luke 16:23).

15. "Anyone whose name was not found in the book was thrown into the lake of fire."

The lake of fire -- hell -- is the final and eternal torment for every lost soul. This is the place of fire and brimstone. The place of, "...eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41). The place of everlasting punishment, "...unquenchable fire..." (Matthew 3:12).

Now we will enter the final two chapters of Revelation. These will be so refreshing and uplifting as we - true believers in Christ - look forward to our eternity with our Father, our King and His Holy Spirit.

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

LESSON 99

This Weeks Lesson -Revelation Chapter 21, Verses 1-4

Quick Recap:

This lesson is a milestone in our study of Revelation because chapter 21 is the transition point that shifts our focus from the judgments of God to our eternity with God. Our journey through chapters 1 through 20 have given us an amazing view of Jesus as the holy and righteous Judge. They also led us through volumes of Old Testament prophecy, sometimes providing a connection between scripture we had never recognized before, and in doing so, gave us an in-depth look at the actions Jesus will take to rid His creation of all sin. Surprisingly, He will then uncreate all that has been created, putting in motion a new creation of a sinless environment for us, His bride, to dwell with Him forever.

We also learned the reason all of these horrific end-times judgements and destruction will be necessary, and why they will be righteous and just. We saw the character of mankind in his end-times state, more sinful and wicked than we could ever imagine. So sinful, that even though they will recognize God for who He is, they will blaspheme His name until the very end. That's so tragic because God intended for man to live sinless in a sinless world. That's how mankind, the heavens and the earth were originally created. But God gave man a choice - be obedient to Him and live with Him in perfection forever, or turn away from Him and suffer eternal consequences. God then established a plan for man's life of obedience that was so simple. Man only had one command to follow. A command he could have easily complied with had he only run from sin's source and avoided its temptation. But he didn't. Instead, man turned away from God in favor of sin and was eternally cursed with death. Yet God, in His infinite mercy and grace, offered to forgive man's sin by taking man's sin on Himself. A free gift of redemption if man will simply accept the offer of forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. But sadly, mankind in general will reject God's gift and by the end-of-time will become so sinful and demonic that the total annihilation of all unbelievers and the sin-scared earth and universe they live in will be required.

That final destruction brings us to chapter 21. The future time when all sin, all sources of sin and the effects of sin will be totally eradicated. All creation will be destroyed and a new home will be created for God's people. A perfect home for a perfect people, for a perfect eternity. This will be the "New Heaven and New Earth". The place where God will reside with His faithful followers. The place we know of as heaven.

That's why this lesson is such an important milestone. Our focus will now shift from the judgment of sinners to the future of the righteous - us - those who have accepted God's grace through the saving work of Christ on the cross.

But I must be completely transparent. During my study for this lesson my heart was heavily burdened by the realization that most Christians, often including myself, are not as heavenly minded as we should be. Sure, we think of heaven and how glorious it will be once we're there, but we don't think much about why we're really going there in the first place. We think of an eternity in heaven when there is no more pain and suffering and when the strife of life is replaced

with perpetual joy, but we're often so focused on the concerns of our own lives that we forget about the lost lives of others. We know that Jesus told us not to, "...store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where mold and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21). Yet, think about how much time we spend accumulating wealth and belongings. Often filling our garages and attics with stuff we don't even use. Fixated on investments and finances, and never satisfied with what we have but always wanting more. How much time do we spend primping and preparing a body that Paul says is an, "...earthly tent..." that will be replaced by "...an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." (2 Corinthians 5:1). How often do we truly, "...set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." (Colossians 3:1), or, do we set our hearts on the things of earth and what it has to offer despite the fact John tells us, "Do not love the world or anything in the world." Why? Because, "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever's does the will of God lives forever." (1 John 2:15 and 17). Paul strikes a deeper cord in our earth-focused heart when he reminds us, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ..." (Philippians 3:20). But do we? Do we eagerly await our Savior? Do we yearn for the Rapture? Do we do as the psalmist says and, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." (Psalms 42:1). When was the last time most Christians truly panted to see the Lord? More than they pant for a bigger house, or a new car, or more stuff to put in their attic?

Now don't take all of this the wrong way. God has given us life, in His image, and there's nothing wrong with enjoying our time on earth as long as we do it in a way that glorifies Him. We can enjoy life, love our families, and work hard to provide for them. But, we must do so with a focus on our obedience and service to the Lord. That's the reality of being a true believer in Christ. When we are saved God could easily protect us from sin, pain, suffering and illness. He could make us rich and completely healthy and content. Instead, we go through the same struggles and pressures the rest of the world goes through, but...we go through them with Christ at our side, walking every step with us. When that happens, and the world sees us dealing with life's issues differently than they do, the world realizes we have something they don't -- we have Jesus. Friends, there is no greater testimony for Christ than when the lost world sees a believer dealing with life's struggles with peace and strength.

There is an old quote from Oliver Wendal Holmes that makes no sense to me, "You're so heavenly minded you're no earthly good." I understand what he means. We can get so engrossed in spiritual things that we lose track of our earthly responsibilities. But I look at it another way - "If everyone was so heavenly minded the earth would be so good." Brothers and Sisters, we need to have our minds on heaven. Not on pearly gates and streets of gold, but heaven as the place where our Lord dwells and we will dwell with Him - forever. In His garden prayer Jesus said, "Father, I want those you have given me to be where I am, and to see my glory..." (John 17:24). He even promised to go there and prepare a place for us (John 14:2) so that He will dwell with us. (Revelation 21:3). Obviously Jesus was heaven focused, so we must be too. Not focused on the riches of heaven but focused on heaven as the place where Jesus is, and where we will serve Him and "...see his face..." (Revelation 22:4).

I'll share something with you but don't I want you to take it the wrong way. It was a comment said to me in empathy by a person who meant well, but it illustrates exactly what I'm talking about.

When my sweet Mother passed away so many wonderful people offered a very consoling thought, "She's in a better place." People often say that at the passing of a loved one, often oblivious to what it really means, but always meaning well. In my Mom's case it was true because my Mom was a true believer of the work of Christ on the cross. But one person said something to me that was comforting but also disturbing, "I wonder if your Mom has found your Dad yet?" On one hand I understood their sentiment because my Dad was a believer too, and it was meant to make me feel good. But as they walked away I wanted to say, "You've missed the whole point. When my Mom finds my Dad that will be great. But she didn't seek the Kingdom of heaven to be with my Dad. She wanted to go to heaven to be with Jesus." I understood and greatly appreciated their sentiment, but I wanted them to understand that our reason for seeking heaven is not for a family reunion or even to escape the challenges of life. Our desire to go to heaven is to be with Jesus. That's why our heavenly focus should be on Jesus and our desire to be in heaven should be a desire to be with Jesus.

When I think of heaven and I try to imagine what it will be like to stand in awe before our glorious King, but I cannot adequately put into words all the amazing thoughts that run through my mind. Can you imagine seeing His face, and hearing His voice and being able to sit in His holy presence while we bask in the brilliant radiance of His glory.

But until that day comes, may we live each day He gives us with the strength and determination that comes only from Jesus. And may we be a witness for Him every day so that those we lead to Jesus will also have an unquenchable yearning to be where He is.

Now let's unpack chapters 21 and 22 to see what awaits us...

1. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

1. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea."

1.a. - "Then I saw..."

Several times we've talked about John's use of the term, "...I saw..."; "eidon" in Greek, which can be translated to words like, watch, behold, appearing, recognizing or to perceive. To me this brings authenticity to his vision and further illustrates that Revelation is much more than just imagery and allegory. John doesn't say, "...I imagined...", or "...I dreamed...". He is direct and emphatic, using the term, "...I saw..." to add substance and depth to what he observed. --- But in this context "...I saw..." also highlights a chronology of related events in chapters 19 and 20:

- "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True." (Revelation 19:11).
- "And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat of the flesh of

kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small.” (Revelation 19:18).

- “Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army.” (Revelation 19:19).
- “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having keys to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain.” (Revelation 20:1).
- “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.” (Revelation 20:4).
- “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.” (Revelation 20:11).
- “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened.” (Revelation 20:12).
- “Then I saw “a New Heaven and a New Earth...” (Revelation 21:1).

When taken together these verses give us a chronology of events that will progress from the return of Christ, to Armageddon, the Millennial Kingdom, the Great White Throne judgment, and the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. The term "...I saw..." works well to put the right emphasis on these key events as John walks us through this journey.

1.b. - "...a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away..." In verse 20:11 we saw the literal uncreation of all God had created, “The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.” This is the point in time when God will eliminate all creation in order to make it new. A "...new heaven and the new earth..."; the eternal home for us - believers in Christ Jesus. This will not be the original creation rebuilt, restored or relocated. It will be created from scratch; all new and all glorious, a place reflecting God's ultimate perfection. As we discussed in chapter 20 there are several prophecies related to this event:

- Peter spoke about that day and said - "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear in a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."..."That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a New Heaven and a New Earth, where righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:10 / 12).
- Isaiah was given several prophecies related to this event:
 - “Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies.” (Isaiah 51:6).
 - "See, I will create a New Heaven and a New Earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,..." (Isaiah 65:17-18)
 - "As the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure." (Isaiah 66:22).
- The writer of Hebrews also speaks to this same event - “In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe...” (Hebrews 1:10).
- And finally, Jesus, in the Olivet Discourse Jesus explains very simply - “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Matthew 24:35).

I repeat those verses from our earlier lesson to emphasize the fact God will uncreate all He has previously created. He will not simply restore it, but will create it new. Why? Because this will be the place Christ lives with His bride - the church - for eternity, and nothing short of perfection will do.

1.c. - "...and there was no longer any sea."

There are different opinions about what this means but to me it seems to indicate the significant difference between the physical aspects of the current earth and the recreated earth. We see this is the Greek root of the word "...new..."; "kainos", which seems to indicate something more than just a simple replacement. It means a new quality of an item, fresh in development, unused, literally, "not found exactly like this before." For example, in its current state the earth is about $\frac{3}{4}$ water - found mostly in its seas. That's significantly important because it is the cyclic process of evaporation and rain or condensation that replenishes the earth with the moisture required to hydrate and sustain life. Similarly, our bodies are about 60% water, with our brains being 73% and our lungs 83%. That's why a plant, animal or human can only live a few days without water to replenish what is lost through evaporation or perspiration. Very simply, if there was no water on earth to promote the evaporation process then the earth and everything on it would quickly become a parched and dehydrated wasteland. Given that, the absence of a "...sea..." (a water-based ecology) would be fundamentally different from the world today. The New Earth will not be dependent on the natural process of evaporation to provide water. Either God will provide everything we need or we will not need it.

2. "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

2.a. - "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God..."

Throughout the Bible the city of Jerusalem is called God's "...Holy City..."

- Nehemiah 11:1 - "Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while nine-tenths remained in the other cities."
- Daniel 9:24 - "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place."
- Revelation 11:8 - "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."
- Revelation 21:10 - "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."
- Revelation 22:19 - "And if anyone takes away from the words of the scroll of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this scroll."

These verses clearly establish the current Jerusalem as the "holy city" of God. The place God chose for His chosen people but also the place from which Jesus will reign during the Millennial Kingdom. (2 Samuel 7:13), when "...living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea..." (Zechariah 14:8) But here in chapter 21 we see a "...new Jerusalem..." It is not the ancient city of Jerusalem that will be trampled on for 42 months during the Tribulation (Revelation 11:2). Nor will it be the restored capital of the

Millennial Kingdom that will be attacked by the temporarily-released satan in his last ditch but feeble effort to defeat Christ. (Revelation 20:7-10). No. Neither of them will do, having both been tainted by the wickedness of man. This will be the heavenly city, the namesake of "...the city he loves..." (Revelation 20:9), but similar in name only. This "city" will replace the earthly city just as the New Heaven and New Earth will replace the old. The New Jerusalem will be the seat of God's heavenly power, and as we'll see beginning in verse 9 it will be the place prepared for His people.

2.b. - "...prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

In chapter 19 we studied the wedding supper of the Lamb. If you'll recall, John used the example of a Jewish wedding process to describe the relationship between Christ and His church. This process had three steps:

- First, was the "Betrothal", a contract was made in advance by the Father to arrange for a wedding between his son and the bride. This was often made years in advance, and maybe before the bride and groom were even born. This phase is illustrated in the Bible by John 17:24 where Jesus says, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am...", and in John 3:16 when God the Father "...Gave..." His Son that the world might be saved. The bride represents the church - the body of true believers - who has been given (betrothed) to Jesus.
- The next step was the "Presentation". This is when the husband would go get his wife, bring her to his father's house where he had built a room or an addition where they would live. When this day occurred the bride would be ready, cleaned and dressed in her finest garments. Just as John says of the bride at the wedding supper who will have "...made herself ready..." "...fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear..." (Revelation 19:7-8). Jesus speaks of this same event in John 14:3 when He says, "My Father's house has many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." This is further illustrated in the Bible by the Rapture. The event when Jesus - the Groom - will return to gather the body of believers - His bride - the church - when we will be "...caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord." And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- The final step was the "Ceremony" when the bride and groom are united as one. This is illustrated first by the Millennial Kingdom when the bride returns with the triumphant Christ. (Revelation 19:14), but also in this chapter when the new Jerusalem, the "holy city", that will be populated by the heavenly gathering of believers from all generations, the holy people, will also take on the title of, the bride, "...beautifully dressed for her husband." (Revelation 21:2).

But looking back to the first part of verse 2, what does John mean when he says, "...the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...". So what exactly is, "...coming down..." and where is it coming from? Let's unpack this a bit. The term "...New Heaven..." does not mean God is going to remake His heavenly home. It is speaking to the universe, the stars, planets and galaxies in the "heavens". God will recreate the earth and all of the celestial bodies and elements of "space". That's what God will recreate as the "...New Heavens and the New Earth..." The term "New Jerusalem" in this chapter speaks to the place where God lives. This is a place we will learn more about later in this chapter and chapter 22. The place Abraham was looking for, "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." "...to Mount

Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” (Hebrews 11:10 and 12:22). This is a real place, the “place” Jesus spoke about when He said, “My Father’s house has many rooms...”...”And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me...” This is the “place” where Jesus went to prepare an eternal home for us. It’s not some kind of spiritual dimension. It is a real “place”, the “...Father’s house..” The place where God lives where Jesus has gone to prepare for His bride. This place, called here the “...New Jerusalem...” is literally the house of God that will “...come down...”, so that , “...God’s dwelling place is now among the people...” (Revelation 21:3). But if it is a place, and it is coming “...down...”, where is it coming from? We don't know. All we know is it comes “...down...” to be on the new earth. Looking back to chapter 4 we have a unique view into God’s heaven, and in his description John gives us an indication of where it is, “After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here.” The only direction John was given was to come “...up...” From his vantage point on earth the place where God was, in heaven, is “...up...”. Similarly, when Paul was given a view of heaven he said he was “...caught up...” to the third heaven. (2 Corinthians 12:2). So wherever heaven is, from our vantage point it is “...up...”, but will one day “...come down...” Before then, we will be there with the Lord. Whether at the Rapture or at our passing we will enter the place where God dwells, in the place prepared for us, until He brings it down to His new creation.

3. "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

But where will it come down to? John hears a proclamation from heaven announcing an event we can barely get our minds around, but an event we yearn for with all our heart. The New Jerusalem, the heavenly house of God, modified to include a place for us, will come down so that “...God’s dwelling place is now among his people...” This is the true essence of salvation. Although our salvation rescues us from hell, we don't seek salvation just to avoid eternal punishment. And although heaven will be an amazing place, its environs and benefits are not why we want to go there. We should want to be in heaven to dwell with God. God Almighty, the All Powerful and All Knowing, will bring His heaven to His new creation so He can dwell with us, “...among his people...” No longer will we have to imagine God in our minds, or seek God in spirit, or pray to God unseen. Instead, He will be “...among...” us, physically with us, and we will be His holy and redeemed people dwelling in eternity with our Holy, Holy, Holy God.

Hallelujah!

4. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

This is such a poetic verse. Often quoted, it brings joy to our hearts when we think about a time when there are no tears forever. Isaiah spoke of this when he said, “The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. In this day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us.” (Isaiah 25:9). John spoke of this as well when he recited the praise of the heavenly host, the Four Living Creatures and the Twenty-Four Elders who proclaimed, “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17). Some view these as tears of remorse. Maybe shame over what they had done, or guilt over what they had not done. Maybe even tears of joy when we

first see the face of Christ. That's certainly possible. But by this point in the end-times chronology of events we will not have shame or guilt. Paul says we will "...changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye...", and "...raised imperishable..." , clothed in a new being. A redeemed, holy and righteous being. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). We will be unable to have those emotions or dwell on our past. Instead, the wiping of our tears by God may be another indication of how fundamentally different we will be in that future state. There will be no more death, suffering, pain, sadness, remorse, shame or guilt. None of the things that would make us cry will be present in God's world and no longer impact our hearts or minds. Tears will be impossible to generate because they will have no place in God's holy heaven.

So be encouraged Friends. Paul has already told us we are no longer citizens of this world. No longer, "...foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household." (Ephesians 2:19). As believers in Christ our names are already written in the Lamb's Book of Life. We are already betrothed to the Groom as His bride, eagerly waiting for Him to retrieve us and take us home. But the timing of our retrieval is not our choice. It is God's. And until the day He calls for us, or comes to get us, may we stand tall and bold in His gospel and in His service, focused daily on pleasing our Lord and King.

LESSON 100

Revelation Chapter 21, Verses 5-6b

Quick Recap:

Chapters 21 and 22 complete God's revelation of end-times events by giving us an amazing description of heaven. How fitting that God would end His glorious word from Him by describing our glorious eternity with Him. In verses 1-4 we began to see heaven in a way most people have never thought of before. Not only a place of perfect existence but a place where we will literally and physically dwell in the presence of God. That will be the final step in God's redemptive plan. After His triumphant return (Revelation 14:1 / 19:11), the thousand year earthly Kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6), and the final judgment of man, (Revelation 20:7-15), Jesus will do something totally unexpected and exceptionally profound.-- He will uncreate the created. (Revelation 20:11 / 21: 1). He will not restore or reconstruct the sin-scarred earth and universe, but will instead uncreate it and replace it with a brand-new creation; a New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation. 21:1). The likes of which we can scarcely imagine. He will then do something equally profound -- He will bring His home, the place where He dwells, "...coming down out of heaven from God..." to the recreated earth so that we may dwell with Him forever. (Revelation. 21:2-4 and 10). The original Greek text adds even more depth to our understanding of this verse by describing God's dwelling place with the term, "skene" or "tabernacle", the place of His "habitation", seen as "...coming down...", or "katabainousan", which can be translated, "descending from a higher land". In other words, the place where Jesus promised to prepare a room for us (John 14:3), and the place where He dwells today, appear to be the same place. The place He will bring down to His recreated earth for His redeemed people to live for eternity.

But if that were not enough, something else, almost as indescribable will then occur. We, "...will see his face..." (Revelation 22:4). The face of God that could not be seen by mortal man (Exodus 33:20 / Isaiah 6:5). The face of God whose glory radiated from Moses just from being in His presence. (Genesis 34:29). The face of Jesus that, "...shone like the sun..." in His transfigured and glorified state. (Matthew 17:2). We will see the face of God. The God, "...who lives in unapproachable light, who no one has seen or can see." (1 Timothy 6:16). But at the time John foresees this event in the future we will no longer be sinful man who cannot see the holy face of God through our sin-stained eyes. Instead, we will be glorified. A new creation in ourselves. A people remade through our redemption to be like Jesus (1 John 3:2). Totally recreated in a body "...raised imperishable...", who shall "...bear the image of the heavenly man..." (1 Corinthians 15:42 and 49). People, us, who in that redeemed and righteous state will see the face of our God.

Hallelujah!

I suspect this is a reality most Christians have never thought of. The fact that God will create a perfect place for His children to live and then bring His home down to be with us. A people with whom He will dwell. A people, glorified by the acceptance of Christ on the cross who will see His face. This gives us so much more understanding than a more traditional view of heaven. Entirely different than the world's cartoonish view of little angels sitting on clouds playing a harp, or even the more common view of "...mansions in the sky...". In fact, it's neither of these. Heaven

is a real place, with real people - us - true believers in Christ. What an amazing eternity awaits us who have given our lives to Jesus.

And with that context let's continue with chapter 21.

5-6. "He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6. He said to me, "It is done. (b) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End." - the remainder of verse 6 will be covered in our next lesson.

5. "He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

5.a. - "He who was seated on the throne..."

In an earlier lesson we discussed the throne of God in detail. In some cases, references of God sitting on the throne speaks of God the Father, and in others God the Son, but in all cases we must remember that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are one God, in three roles and all three reign supreme - and together. Here in verse 5 John sees "...He..." who is on the throne. This is similar to his description of God's throne in heaven with "...someone..." sitting on it. (Revelation 4:2). Both references are initially nondescript but John clarifies them in chapter 5 when he tells us the one on the throne holds a scroll of judgment in His right hand and then gives it to the one standing before the throne; Jesus, the Lamb of God. (Revelation 5:1-8). This verse clearly differentiates between the roles of God the Father on the throne and God the Son before the throne. Yet we also know from Christ's admonition to the church at Laodicea he promises, "To the one that is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne." (Revelation 3:21). We also know that when Christ's redemptive work was done He, "...sat down at the right hand of God." (Hebrews 10:12). So, given their position on the throne, the voice John heard here in chapter 21 seems to be the voice of God; Father and Son, and by default, God the Spirit, seen in their combined role as God the Almighty.

5.b. - "...said, "I am making everything new!"

Here God clarifies it is "...He..." who is making all things new. "In the beginning God created..." (Genesis 1:1). In that iconic description of creation we saw both God the Father, plus God the Holy Spirit who was, "...hovering over the waters..." (Genesis 1:2). Then in John's gospel God clarifies the role God the Son had in creation, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things we're made that has been made."...and..."The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...". (John 1:1-3 and 14). When combined, these verses clearly describe the triune nature of God as one God in three persons. It also describes the focus of God on the initial action of creation, who this point in Revelation will reverse His original creation as He uncreates in order to replace what has been marred with perfection.

5.c. - "Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Interestingly, after documenting God's narrative up to this point John was reminded to keep writing. It's certainly possible his initial view of the New Heaven and New Earth were so overwhelming he lost track of his task and had to be reminded to keep documenting what he saw. But it also reminds us to "...keep reading..." even though what we are reading seems more fantastic

than we can get our head around. We are reminded no matter how amazing all of this sounds, it is "...trustworthy and true...", because "...these words..." are the words of God:

- At his vision of Christ's Second-Coming John described Jesus as, "...and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called *Faithful and True*." (Revelation 19:11).
- These are, "...the words of the Amen, the *faithful and true* witness, the ruler of God's creation." (Revelation 3:14).
- It is Jesus who speaks, "...the way, the *truth* and the life..." (John 14:6).
- He is "...the *faithful* God..." (Deuteronomy 7:9).
- The "...*faithful* High Priest..." (Hebrews 2:17).
- The "...works if his hands are *faithful*...", "...he is *faithful* in all he does...", and "...all of his ways are *faithful*...", because "...he remains *faithful*..." (Psalms 111:7 / 145:13 / 145:17 / 146:6).
- Likewise, "All your words are *true*..." (Psalms 119:160).
- The "...*true* light that gives light..." (John 1:9).
- The "...*true* bread...", (John 6:32).
- "These are the *true* words of God." (Revelation 19:9).

These verses and many more remind us that no matter how unbelievable John's description may sound, it is *true*, because it is the words of our *faithful* God.

6. "He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life." (Note: We will discuss the last part of this verse (6.c.) in our next lesson and combine it with verse 7.)

6.a. - "He said to me, "It is done..."

In an earlier lesson we discussed a similar proclamation from the Lord. As the seventh angel poured his Bowl of wrath on the air there came, "...a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" (Revelation 16:17). What God says in both of these passages is short and to the point, and yet so amazingly profound, --- "It is done!" So given the importance of those three small words and their application here in chapter 21 let's go back and quickly review a portion of the text from our earlier discussion in Revelation 16.

"It is done!" --- Where have we heard similar words before? When Jesus went to the cross He took on Himself the sin of mankind. This was the "cup" of wrath poured on Jesus by God. (Matthew 26:42 / Hebrews 2:9). This was the wrath reserved for every sinful human that was accepted by God, as the sinless Christ, so that His holy sacrifice as the Spotless Lamb would be a purchase and pardon for our sin (Romans 3:25-26). At the point Jesus released His earthly body to a earthly death He said, "It is finished", (John 19:30). In Matthew's account Jesus, "...cried out again in a loud voice..." (Matthew 27:50). The loud voice was God's voice, manifest in the Son. The voice that cried, "It is finished."; "Tetelestai", which in Greek means "it is accomplished" or "paid in full". In this statement He proclaimed a completed task God had sent Him to do. But now in chapter 21 all that was sinful will be gone, the Millennial Kingdom will have concluded and satan and sinful mankind will have been judged and sentenced. God will then remake all creation and proclaim in a final announcement, "It is done!" This is a different word in Greek with a slightly different meaning. "Gegonen!", as in "it has come to pass" or "it has taken place". But in both cases, God's will was accomplished. Through Jesus it was "tetelestai", accomplished, so that mankind could be made new. Then at the end, "gegonen", will come to pass as the remainder of God's creation is made new. Combined, God's entire prophetic task for the redemption of man

will have been fulfilled. In the first, the Lamb of God accepted the wrath intended for man --- and offered salvation for all who will accept. --- But in the end, rejecting man, will have to suffer God's wrath when the redemptive Lamb of God returns as the destroying Warrior Judge to accomplish His predetermined end-times task. When He is complete, when all sin is removed and a new creation is in place for His faithful followers, God will proclaim, --- "It is done!"

6.b. - "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End..."

At the beginning of Revelation John sees the risen and righteous Jesus in His glorified state. The one who, "...freed us from our sins by his blood..." To John He proclaimed, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:5 and 8). The terms "alpha and omega" are the first and last characters of the Greek alphabet (the common language of John's day and of the New Testament). It is used here to symbolize the beginning and the end, but also to help us understand the infinite breadth of God's authority and holy power. Just as the letters of the alphabet can be arranged to represent any word, thought or phrase, so too is the unlimited and supreme power of God. John uses the term "alpha and omega" three times in Revelation; 1:8, 21:6 and 22:13. In each case the Lord is emphasizing the fact He is the supreme authority over all things, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead." (Colossians 1:17-18). Since God He has no beginning and He will have no end, He is always, in all things. Therefore He controls all time from beginning to the end, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I will make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." (Isaiah 46:9-10).

That's why God and God alone can declare, "It is done!"

LESSON 101

Revelation Chapter 21, Verses 6(c)-8

Quick Recap:

I ended our previous lesson before completing verse 6. That's because the end of verse 6 is closely related to verse 7 and I wanted to discuss them together. In verses 5 and 6 we saw God, seated on His throne and exercising His most profound act of creation, "I am making everything new!" What an amazing statement. At the end of the Millennial Kingdom, and following the final judgment of mankind, God will uncreate the universe and then recreate it anew. Very simply, a repaired or reconstructed creation would not be adequate for His followers. Instead, just as we have been made new through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and even more so in our future raptured or resurrected bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), God will make all creation new, and in doing so wipe clean every sinful scar and memory. God then reminded John to, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." It was as if the sheer magnitude of what John saw caused him to momentarily forget his task of documenting his vision. So God reminded him and then emphasized that His words are "...trustworthy and true..." no matter how unbelievable they may sound.

The finality of all this is brought to bear in verse 6 when God said, "It is done." God's redemptive plan for mankind will have been completed by this point. Grace and mercy will no longer be needed because all who will accept Christ will have done so. Then the final act of recreating all that had been created "...In the beginning..." will bring those actions to a close. "It is done" will mean exactly that: as God's focus shifts to His people and His dwelling will shift to be with us. We are then reminded who it is declaring "It is done." The only one with the supreme authority who can declare when the creative and redemptive actions are complete. Only God can do that. The "...Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End..." The one who was there at the beginning is the only one who can declare when it is complete.

Now with that context let's continue by picking up at the last part of verse 6.

6.(c) "To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

6.c. - "To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."

Verses 6 and 7 answer the question about who will actually dwell with God in His New Heaven and New Earth. (Revelation 21:3). It is us. Those who will inhabit the place Jesus prepared for them. (John 14:1-4). Those who will see God's face. (Revelation 22:4). Those who are redeemed by coming to faith through the acceptance of God's grace through the blood atonement of sin. (John 3:16-17). This is the ultimate fulfillment of Jesus' simple but profound proclamation, "...no one comes to the Father except through me..." (John 14:6). Now, in the future we see the reality of that statement. Heaven will be populated by us, the redeemed of humanity, who by acceptance of God's grace became His people. Not by works, or sacrament, or even "religion", but simply by

faith in Christ Jesus. Heaven's population will include the Old Testament saints, believers of the church age, redeemed Israel and those who will accept Christ during the Tribulation. But here in verses 6 and 7 the Lord summarizes all of that and describes those who will spend eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth with two words:

- "...thirsty..." and,
- "...victorious..."

Let's break each of these down:

6.c. - "To the thirsty..."

Most of us have probably never been really thirsty. Certainly there have been times when we badly needed a drink of water and maybe even times when we were dehydrated, but for the most part most modern Americans have never been in a situation where there was no water to drink. Where extreme heat or cold saps the moisture from our bodies. Where wells are dug by hand, or where natural water is tepid and bacteria infested. Places where the only water for miles may come from a mud hole. It's sometimes hard for us to truly understand what it's like to have no water because we live in a land and society where water is in abundance - and wasted. For example, it's estimated in America alone over 900 billion (Big B) gallons of water are wasted every year just by letting our faucets drip, or by running water while we brush our teeth, or through leaking pipes, or worst of all, by watering our grass. And that's not counting the millions of gallons flushed away every day with no life-giving value at all. That's a significant statistic when you consider that less than 1% of the earth's water is drinkable. Most is salt-water, polar ice or groundwater, but very little is fit to drink. This results in over 1.8 billion people drinking contaminated water every day. People whose bodies need water just like we do, but when no clean water is available bacteria infested water is all they have. These people, all around the world, many of them brothers and sisters in Christ crave a single glass of cool, clean water to heal and nourish their parched bodies. - Water they do not have.

When taken in that context the term "thirsty" takes on a much greater meaning. Thirst in the third-world causes severe dehydration, headaches, diarrhea, hair loss, tooth decay, skin disease, kidney failure and death. The lack of water is not an inconvenience, it is the single most important source of life for millions of people. Webster defines the condition of real thirst as "A feeling of needing and wanting. A craving; parched and dry." We think of being thirsty as the need for refreshment, while most of the world thinks of thirsty as a fine line between life and death. An intense and gnawing need for something so important to their very existence.

And that is why the thirsty will inherit the Kingdom of God. Our spiritually thirst. Not those who see their faith as a need for refreshment, but those who crave the Lord. Those who understand the desperation of life without living waters. Those who need, want and crave the presence of Christ in a life that is dry and parched by sin. In the Greek, "dipsonti", to thirst, is to "intensely desire something. To painfully long for it. To desire being refreshed, supported and strengthened." It is those who crave and long for the very presence of God in their life. The ones who, "...thirst for righteousness..." (Matthew 5:6). Those who cannot be nourished by the cesspool of contaminated worldly waters, but those to whom Jesus promises, "...who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38). This is the same promise given to the multitudes before the throne who will praise God for salvation. Those who, "...never again will they thirst." (Revelation 7:16). And as Jesus

said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."..."Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14).

But in Scripture there is probably no more beautiful description of our thirst for Jesus than that found in the 42nd Psalms.

"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God." (Psalms 42:1). This is a psalm of the downcast. Of one who in the trials of life finds themselves alone and vulnerable, but in the midst of their turmoil and depression they lean on the Lord. They seek His face. They yearn and crave His love. Even to the point of panting in spiritual thirst as they seek the nourishment that can only come from God.

Now let's break this down a bit more:

42.1.a. - "As the deer pants..."

The Psalmist speaks of a deer. A wild animal that is normally gentle, but an animal that is often hunted. A panting deer would indicate exhaustion, stress or fatigue. Maybe from danger or being pursued? The prophet Joel uses a similar example when speaking of a lamentation over Israel, "Even the wild animals pant for you; and the streams of water have dried up..." (Joel 1:20). In either case the very act of panting indicates great need. Or in other words, a great thirst for something it desperately needs.

42.1.b. - "...for streams of water..."

A stream of water is always flowing, never still and never stagnant. It reminds me of my youth, staying at my Grandmother's in the mountains of North Carolina and spending hundreds of hours wading and fishing in the beautiful flowing creeks. Even as a young boy I marveled at the millions of gallons of water flowing down those creeks every day. A seemingly endless supply, coming from a hidden source, never stopping, always clean, cold and refreshing. Much like our faith; originating from a hidden spring deep in our soul as the water of life becomes a fountain welling-up from within for our eternal life. (John 4:14). It is the water of life Jesus spoke of. The faith that ensures, "...whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35). It is the promise Jesus made when He said, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them". By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believe in Him were later to receive." (John 7:38-39). This is the water of life. The presence of God in our lives through the indwelling Holy Spirit. As the Psalmist declares to God, "For with you is the fountain of life..." (Psalms 36:9), "...the spring of living water..." (Jeremiah 2:13). It is the eternal promise made to those who, "...have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14). "...never again will they thirst..." "...For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water." (Revelation 7:16 and 17).

Jesus is our spiritual refreshment in life. The living waters that well-up from a dry and parched soul to one that is washed clean and nourished, never to thirst again. It is the Lord who, "...will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun scorched land and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." (Isaiah 58:11).

42.1.c. - "...so my soul pants for you, my God."

And so we pant. Exhausted from life and pursued by trials we run to Jesus. The water of life, the fountain that overflows, the source of all spiritual nourishment. It is Jesus, who is always there, with love overflowing if we will simply crave for His presence in our lives.

6.d. - "...I will give water without cost..."

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money..." (Isaiah 55:1). The water of life, brought to us through our salvation is priceless, but it costs us nothing. The bill was paid in full on the cross by Jesus. His payment, through the shedding of His Divine blood washed away our sin. He paid the price, but we must believe.

6.e. - "...from the spring of the water of life."

It is from Christ, the spring of life by which we come to grace through the work of the Holy Spirit. From a Revelation perspective this reminds us of Christ's return, when He stands with His feet on Mount Zion, with a roar as the Lion of Judah, He will make the earth and heavens tremble, and "...living water will flow out from Jerusalem; half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter. The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name." (Revelation 14:1 / 5:5 / Joel 3:16 / Zechariah 14:8-9).

And His spring is the only spring, and His water is the only refreshment for our soul. It is from Christ and Christ alone that our thirst is quenched. It is a yearning for the Lord I find difficult to put in words. So I will let the Psalmist speak the words indwelt to him by God,

"I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land." (Psalms 143:6),

"You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being belongs to you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." (Psalms 63:1-3).

Hallelujah!

7. "Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children."

The second characteristic of those who will dwell for eternity with God are the "...victorious...". This comes from the Greek root "Nikon", which also means to overcome, to prevail, to carry off a victory and to conquer. Paul tells us we are, "...more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Romans 8:37). We all know the trials of life, temptation, sin and failure. But Jesus comforts us that, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). Our victory that brings us eternal life as children of God is not through anything we have done, but is victory won through our acceptance of the work of Christ on the cross. As Jesus told the church at Ephesus, "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7). It is the victory He promised the church at Thyatira to those who, "...does my will to the end." (Revelation 2:26). It is also those, "...who

had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name." (Revelation 15:2). It is the victory that swallows up death. (1 Corinthians 15:54) because, "He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you..." (1 Corinthians 15:57-58). But how is this victory translated to us through our faith in Christ? Because, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21). Very simply, "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only him who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." (1 John 5:4-5). His victory over our sin is our victory over eternal death.

So these are those who will dwell with God for eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth. Those of us who thirst for Christ and through our salvation have become victorious over our sin.

8. "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

But the rest of mankind; those who have not accepted the gift of God's grace on the cross will not inherit the Kingdom of God. These will be those who died unrepentant and will not be resurrected until after the Millennial Kingdom and just prior to the Great White Throne Judgment. (Revelation 20:5 and 12-15). This is called the "Second death" (Revelation 20:6), because those who die physically in Christ will never die spiritually, but those who die first in sin will spiritually die in the second death when they are cast into hell and removed forever from the presence of God. (Revelation 20:14). Here in verse 8 John describes the characteristics of those who will die the second death. The ones Jude describes as "...an example of those who will suffer the punishment of eternal fire." (Jude 7). This list of sins does not mean everyone who is a coward, or who lies or who is immoral will go to hell. In our own lives we have all committed many sins like this. But this list represents those unbelievers whose sins are unconfessed and therefore unatoned by the blood of Christ. It is they who will be destined to an eternity in hell.

Yet there is hope. We have a chance to share the gospel and help them achieve eternal life by, "...snatching them from the fire." (Jude 23).

LESSON 102

Revelation Chapter 21, Verses 9-13

Quick Recap:

In our last lesson we saw who will dwell with God in the New Heaven and New Earth. It will be those of us who thirst for Christ and those who have been victorious over our sin through our acceptance of Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The remainder of mankind, those who died without redemption of their sins, will be cast into hell and forever separated from God. This spiritual separation will be a much greater punishment than fire and brimstone. Hell will separate non-believers from their Creator and subject them to an eternity with no thought of God, no prayer, no encouraging scripture and no opportunity to seek relief from their anguish and torment. Although the physical punishment of hell will be something we can barely imagine, can you see the greater punishment that will come from an existence without the presence of the Lord? It seems that years ago pastors used to talk more about hell. They didn't do that to frighten their congregations, but they wanted people to understand there are only two options: - one through Christ to eternal glory or one without Christ to eternal damnation. They wanted them to understand the severe eternal consequences of the most important decision they will ever make, so they preached about hell. But in many "religious" circles today hell is not a welcomed subject. People are more focused on working their way to heaven, or being good enough to get into heaven, or maybe even feeling that heaven is just one more reward in the prosperity they already have on earth. Whole denominations and apostate pastors willingly lead their congregations to the gates of hell by teaching that something other than Jesus can be a way to achieve eternal life with God. But as we have seen, that is not Biblical. What is Biblical - even as isolationist as it might sound - is that salvation from hell comes only through Christ and Christ alone. (John 14:6). Not from offering sacraments to Him, singing praises for Him, religious knowledge of Him, or even telling people about Him. (Matthew 7:21-23). Salvation comes through an understanding that Christ alone and His work on the cross is the only source of redemption from sin and is the only gateway to the Father in heaven --- a gate that is very narrow. (Matthew 7:13-14). I am simply amazed that entire denominations can read the Bible, look to Christ on the cross and still somehow feel they can do more than that, give more than that, or sacrifice more than that in their feeble attempts to do more than Jesus did.

This non-Biblical works-sacrament-based theology is the same fruit satan offered Eve. Rather than handing her the fruit and threatening to kill her if she didn't eat it, satan deceived her. He slowly and methodically crafted a lie to convince her that what God said wasn't true, and that if she would simply eat the fruit she would know God and be like God. That's the same thing satan does today in heretical pulpits around the world. Through false doctrine he has slowly and methodically convinced billions they can idolize their way to heaven, work their way to heaven, pay their way to heaven, be good enough to get to heaven, somehow earn a place in heaven through sacraments and offerings, or maybe even walk an aisle, recite a few words and convince yourself that's all you need to do. And each time satan does this he hands them the same fruit he handed Eve, making his way look so much more appealing and alluring than God's way. This is why Jesus makes the real way so simple and clear - simple enough for anyone to understand, "I AM the way and the truth and the life. NO ONE comes to the Father [in heaven] except through me.". (John 14:6). Sadly, there will be a time in the future when this offer will no longer be extended. A time when God's grace and mercy will no longer be offered. A time when the judgment of

mankind and the entire universe will be complete. This will be the time when the Lord will say, "It is done." and remakes everything new. (Revelation 21:5-6a). Yet, it is that reality that makes our eternity with the Lord so much sweeter. An eternity we could not earn and could not buy. An eternity we could never be religious enough to obtain. It is an eternity secured only through our faith in the work of Christ, His holy blood upon the cross, and our sin defeated through His resurrection. This is a gift we must share with others so they too can understand and accept. That's why God reserved the last two chapters of His amazing word to help us better understand the place we will go to be with Him. It is our future with Him that causes us to yearn and thirst for Him. It is our thirst for Him that drives us to share His story with others.

To see this even more clearly in our last lesson we dug deep into Psalms 42 in order to understand what it really means to "thirst" for Jesus. To truly grasp our need to yearn and crave the presence of the Holy Lord in our lives. I don't know about you but I was so encouraged and uplifted as I studied this Psalms. It further reinforced in my mind the need for us, as believers, to get above the politics and panic of our world and truly seek the face of our Lord as we lean on Him as the Controller of all things. In doing so may we all spend our energy in the loving pursuit of Jesus instead of focusing our attention on the problems of the world. May we also recognize that the very issues that confuse and confound a lost world may also make them more receptive to the truth found in the gospel. The truth we can share.

Now in this part of chapter 21 we begin to see a detailed description of the third part of God's recreated future - the New Jerusalem. The Holy City that God will bring down to the New Heaven and New Earth so that He may dwell with us. This is almost more than our feeble minds can understand. That's why God goes to such length to describe what we will see. Through the remaining verses of chapter 21 and into chapter 22 we will be amazed as we try to wrap our heads around the details He has provided. We will do our best to understand what we see in our minds as we walk through the text, but in some ways the description is more than we can grasp as we get a vivid preview of our eternity to come.

"What a day that will be, when my Jesus I shall see. When He takes me by the hand, and leads through the promised land. What a day that will be, when my Jesus I will see. What a day, what a glorious day that will be."

Hallelujah!

To give us adequate time to discuss the amazing details of this text I've broken our discussion into several lessons. First, verses 9 through 13 give us an introductory view of the New Jerusalem. The heavenly dwelling place of God that will come down to the New Earth to be our eternal dwelling place as well. Then verses 14-21 provide even more details of what the New Jerusalem will look like. The remainder of chapter 21 gives insight into the magnificent glory of God as He reigns supreme in His eternal kingdom. Chapter 22 will then wrap-up this glorious book by taking us through Eden made new and Christ's promise, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Now with that context let's see more about what is to come for us in eternity.

9. "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. 13. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west."

9. "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

9. a. - "One of the seven angels who had the seven Bowls full of the seven last plagues..."

We first saw the seven angels in chapter 15, "I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is complete." (Revelation 15:1). These angels will administer God's final judgment as they pour the wrath of God on the land, sea, rivers, sun, throne of the beast, the Euphrates and the air. (Revelation 16). As this wrath is being poured one of the angels showed John the demise of the Tribulation's pagan religion, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters." (Revelation 17:1). Then another angel, with great authority, who illuminated the earth came from heaven to shout praises unto God, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!, as he announces the destruction of the antichrist's empire. (Revelation 18:2). More angels then came. Each one presenting another pronouncement of destruction - culminating in the final eradication of mankind at Armageddon, as an angel calls the earth's birds to devour the dead, and another angel binds satan in the abyss for a thousand years. (Revelation 19:17 / 20:1). Now, at the end, yet another of the seven angels comes to show John something extraordinary.

9. b. - "...came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

In chapter 19 another angel showed John the "Wedding Supper of the Lamb". As we learned, the "wedding" pictured in chapter 19 is illustrated by a Jewish wedding ceremony where the bride is betrothed and presented, and a grand feast takes place to celebrate their union. This analogy is used to represent the joining of Christ and His "bride", the church, who has, "...made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear." (Revelation 19:7-8). But with the bride there were also guests, "...those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb." But if they are invited they are neither the Groom or the bride, so who could they be? They are the remainder of believers from throughout time. Old Testament saints, the remnant of redeemed Israel and those who will come to Christ during the Tribulation. Now, in verse 9 we see the "bride" in a different light. Here she is not only the betrothed of the Groom but is now the wife of the Lamb. She is all believers, fully joined to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, in the place He went to prepare for them. The terms bride and wife are used to illustrate a relationship so beautiful and pure that an analogy of husband and wife is the best description. Not as we may define husband and wife in an earthly physical sense, but a Husband who is the provider, protector and defender of His wife; who is always there, always loyal, always loving and always caring. A bride who without Him would be defenseless against the sin of the world.

10. "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

To see this amazing sight the angel takes John to a high point from which to show him the bride. But once there John sees something totally unexpected. Instead of a group of people the angel shows John a city. A Holy City named Jerusalem. A city prepared by God for His people. This is not the Jerusalem of Israel - which in preview is also called the Holy City (Daniel 9:24) - but is a New Jerusalem. The place where God dwells. It is the "...Father's house..." with many rooms where Jesus returned to prepare a place for us, the raptured, resurrected and redeemed of all ages. (John 14:2). It is "...the Holy City Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her Husband." (Revelation 21:2). The place where God will now dwell "...among the people..." (Revelation 21:3). This is literally heaven. The place where God has been is now seen "...coming down..." from its current location to relocate on the New Earth as the dwelling place of God and now the dwelling place of His faithful children. A city, that when indwelt by God and His people takes on the character of its inhabitants and their title - the bride. The betrothed church that was the bride, is now joined in her eternal home with all believers, from all time, and together the city in which they will dwell with God for eternity becomes the bride as well. The bride and wife of the Lamb. A place that as we will see is more amazing than anything we could ever imagine in our wildest dreams. No artwork, no animation and no image from the most creative minds on earth could ever adequately portray what awaits us in the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem. But here John does his best to give us a preview that makes us thirst for more.

11. "It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."

Here we begin to see a description of God's glorious dwelling place. The house of the Father in which Jesus has prepared a place for us. It's brilliance is described as "...a jasper, clear as crystal..." But typically jasper is not a crystal clear stone. It is generally an opaque form of microgranular quartz-silica that comes in a variety of yellow, brown or red colors. Yet here it is described as "...clear as crystal...", in one sense illustrating the perfection of God's creation, but it might also have a different meaning. In the Greek, jasper comes from the root word "Laspidi" which means a translucent stone. Some commentators contend the word describes a diamond. They get this from the next part of the verse "...clear as crystal..." which comes from the Greek word "Krystallizoni", that can be translated to mean, "To shine like crystal, as brilliant as crystal or to resemble ice." Interestingly, the term John uses here for jasper is the same word he used in Revelation 4:3 to describe his view of God on His throne, "And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby." It is also the same word used to describe the walls of the Holy City and one of its foundation stones. (Revelation 21:18-19). But whether it is clear jasper or diamond is not the point. The reference to its clarity is to help us visualize the glory of God as it is refracted and reflected from the city and across the New Heavens and the New Earth. Here John sees the city shining with the brilliant and radiant glory of God - "Theos" in Greek. A term meaning, "The creator, the owner and sustainer of all things." The God who is with us (Matthew 1:23), the God who is able (Matthew 3:9), the God that is glorified. (John 13:32). The city reflects God's glory. A glory that cannot be muted or decreased as it shines through the walls of His holy dwelling, but is instead magnified as, "...its brilliance was like that of a very precious stone...". This is the glory of God, the "Doxa". In Greek, the "Divine quality, the unspoken manifestation and splendor of God. The magnificence, dignity and grace." Similar to the Hebrew term, "Shekinah", illustrating the brilliance of the glory of God in His temple. This is the place of God's manifestation of His power - the very presence of an All Holy God.

(Exodus 40:34 / 1 Samuel 4:22 / Hebrews 9:5). The glory we will see in the New Jerusalem as it shines brilliantly through a city as clear as crystal.

12. “It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.”

John now begins to describe details of the city. Let's put these together to form a mental image in our mind:

12.a. - “It...”

Starting in verse 12 and running through verse 27 John describes details of the city's appearance. Although we cannot begin to understand the magnificence of what John sees, we will do our best to understand what we can and to develop a hunger to physically see it when that day comes.

12.b. - “...had a great, high wall...”

The city has substance. It is not a cloud or some ethereal place. It is real with permanence and form. As we will see later in verse 16 the terms “...great...”, in Greek, “Mega”, as in mass, space and grand dimensions, and “...high...”, in Greek, “Hyoselon”, as in a lofty mountain and the heights of heaven, need more explanation to clearly understand what this means. Imagine a city whose walls are over 1,400 miles in height and you'll start to get an image of its grandeur. (Revelation 21:16). We'll discuss this in more detail in our next lesson.

12.c / d / e + 13 - “...with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.” 13. “There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.”

Here I have combined parts of verses 12 and 13 because together they provide a single connected description of the city's gates.

12.c. - “...with twelve gates...”

The number twelve, “Dodeka” in Greek, is used multiple times to describe the city of God. Not only are there twelve gates, with twelve angels but there are twelve foundation stones. The number twelve is a number representing completeness and perfection. It is used over 180 times in the Bible; as in the twelve sons of Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, the tree of life which will produce twelve fruits, the twelve apostles, the twelve baskets of leftover loaves and fish, even the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (Revelation 7:4) which is a multiple of 12,000 men from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

12.d. - “...and with twelve angels at the gates...”

Each of the twelve gates is administered by an angel. The Bible doesn't tell us why, but I'll share my thoughts.

- First, there will be no danger in heaven. Verse 21:4 tells us there will be no death, mourning, crying or pain. Verse 8 then lists those maligned by sin who will not be there. Further, verse 27 tells us, “Nothing impure will ever enter it [the city], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life.” In other words, the gates will need no guards, so that's probably not the angels role.
- Second, we know from verse 25 that, “On no day will its gates ever be shut...” That may indicate we will be free to move about because the gates will not block anyone in, and there will be no danger to block out.

- This may indicate the angels are there for us. Remember, at this point on God's grand timetable every believer in heaven will be glorified and righteous with no sin or even the ability to sin. The angels, who throughout time have observed and aided God in His creation will have also assisted Him in His judgment of the world. That means everyone of us who walk in and out of those gates will be the redeemed, those who thirsted after Christ and those who through our acceptance of His work on the cross will have entered His eternal dwelling place. Can you even imagine every time you leave God's Holy City an angel will wish you well on your journey and when you return will welcome you back home. We certainly can't be dogmatic about this but I'm simply sharing how it spoke to my heart.

12.e. - "...On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel..."

For proponents of "Replacement Theology" --- the idea that the church has somehow replaced Israel as God's chosen people --- this is a verse they obviously avoid. Not only does God call His eternal dwelling place the New "Jerusalem", but He has named each of its gates after the twelve tribes of Israel - the sons of Jacob whose name was changed to "Israel" by God, and as He did, He declared, "A nation and a community of nations will come from you.." (Genesis 35:10-11). God will write their names on the gates - inscribed by the hand of God - to represent His continued affection and commitment to His chosen people. He will not name the gates after twelve major cities of the world, or twelve seats of earthly government, or twelve historical figures, but will instead name them after the tribes of Israel. "The glory of Jacob he loves." (Psalms 47:4), "Blessed be the Lord your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel forever..." (1 Kings 10:9), "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwelling places of Jacob." (Psalms 87:2). In my mind this is another clear indication of Israel's key role in God's eternal plan.

13. "There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west."

Here we see twelve gates dispersed equally on all four sides of the city; three on each side according to an earthly compass reading. Three gates on each side leading out from the city to all areas of the New Earth. Interestingly, the Greek for "gates," "Pulon," can be translated to mean, "The passage which led from the street through the front part of the house to the inner court." To me, this indicates again that we will be free to come and go as we please. To transit from the inner sanctuary of God out through His New Heaven and New Earth.

LESSON 103

Revelation Chapter 21, Verses 14-21

Quick Recap:

In our last lesson John began to describe our future and eternal home, the New Jerusalem. The place we will live with God when He brings His dwelling down to the New Heaven and New Earth. Unlike readers in the past, we live in a modern society familiar with motion picture special effects, amazing computer graphics and ultra-realistic animation. As a result, we are accustomed to “seeing” images of fantastic and unbelievable other-worlds. But even the most sophisticated special effects technique can’t prepare our minds for what we now “see” in John’s description of heaven. Why? Because unlike images we see in movies we know what John is describing is real. As believers, our hearts and minds quickly move beyond the realm of our normal imagination to help us make a mental image of what heaven will be like. The Lord helps us to do this by providing vivid imagery to describe the city, its foundations, walls and gates. As we will see, He even tells us its exact size. Although the description is still very hard to grasp (just sit back and really think about it for a minute and you will almost be overwhelmed), the images He provides helps us “see” things much clearer. In doing so it is so reassuring to understand that heaven is not little angels with harps sitting on puffy clouds or spirits floating in some kind of ethereal utopian cosmos. Although John's description strains our human imagination to even conceive what it will be like, we know it will be our home for eternity. A real place, for real people who put our real lives in the hands of our real God.

John began his description by first helping us understand that our future home is more than a physical place. It is the “bride” and “wife” of Christ, in the sense that everyone who dwells there has a righteous and glorious relationship with Jesus based on the fact we have given our earthly lives to Him and have been saved from hell by His grace. He will welcome us, the betrothed bride, to His home. To the place He went to prepare for us so that we may dwell with Him forever. (John 14:2-3 / 17:24). But given this description we shouldn't try to interpret the terms “bride” and “wife” in a secular sense, but as an illustration of a beautiful relationship based on uncompromising and unconditional love. A love that transcends human understanding. A love of the Father, who sent the Son, who came to earth and gave His life for those who would love Him - His “bride”. Once we get our head around that truth it is a beautiful picture of our eternal relationship with Jesus.

From John's initial description we know the city has “...great and high...” walls of jasper, as clear as crystal in their perfection. These walls have twelve gates, with three on each side. Gates that are never shut, indicating our ability to come and go as we please. (Revelation 21:25). The twelve gates are named after the twelve tribes of Israel. Further proof that God’s affection for Israel has not ended and they have not been replaced in their role by the church. Amazingly, each gate is attended by an angel. Potentially situated in a place where they can welcome the believers who use the gates.

Now let's continue with our second of three lessons describing the New Jerusalem.

14. "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lord. 15. The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 16. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. 17. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. 18. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. 19. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20. the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysalis, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21. The temple gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass."

14. "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lord."

Here again we see the number twelve but this time it describes twelve foundations. The description seems to indicate a foundation with twelve layers, like a cake, stacked one upon the other, and on each layer is written the names of the apostles. If you recall, the twelve gates were identified with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. This possibly represents the Old Testament believers who through their faith in God received His grace and atonement of their sin. But here, the foundation layers are named after the apostles which might represent the New Testament church-age believers in Christ. Those who come to Christ through the gospel that was first shared by the apostles. This is the foundation of Christ's true gospel through which the salvation and faith of believers is built. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10) - Like Abraham, we too, through our faith, are called to our eternal inheritance and can look forward to, "...the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." This place, the New Jerusalem, is the place of Abraham's inheritance, and of our own. Our faith, as Paul explains, is built on Jesus, "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 3:11). And as such He is, "...my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." (Psalms 18:2). This is the foundation of our faith, illustrated by the fact we, "...are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-21).

I also see this truth illustrated in the iconic conversation between Jesus and Peter. When Jesus asked who do the people think He is? The apostles answered, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or another prophet. But Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." To which Jesus replied, "...and on this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:13-20). Some contend Jesus was talking about Peter, whose name "Petros" can mean "stone". As if Peter was the foundation on which the church would be built. But I don't think that's what He meant. The

church is built on no man, but is built on Christ Jesus, "...the living Stone..." "...a chosen and precious cornerstone..." (1 Peter 2:4 and 6). It is Jesus, and Him alone, who is the foundation on which our faith is raised. Our foundation is the Groom of the bride, the provider of our eternal home. A home built on the foundation of the gospel. The place we see here, the New Jerusalem whose solid foundation is compared to the gospel faith of redeemed saints, proclaimed first by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul spoke of this faith as the foundation of our relationship with Christ when he said, "Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his..." (2 Timothy 2:19).

Hallelujah!

15. "The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls."

In chapter 11 John was, "...given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go measure the temple of God..." (Revelation 11:1). This required action on John's part. He was to take a rod (a measuring device) and measure the temple in Jerusalem. This measurement illustrates God's ownership and supreme authority. As we discussed, this measurement is important because God does nothing out of chance. Whatever He does is planned to perfection and numbered in intent. It is this exactness that defines God's supreme authority. God measures because God creates and God measures because God owns. We see this clearly in Zechariah 2, which is not only another example of measuring, but the act of measuring helps clarify who the owner is, "Then I looked up, and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, 'Where are you going?' He answered me, 'To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.' --- "And I myself will be a wall around it, declares the Lord, and I will be its glory within." (Zechariah 2:1&5). God measures because God owns and He declares what He owns with such precision there is no doubt.

So now in chapter 21 John describes another measurement, but this time it is an angel, not John, who actually does the measuring, and he does so with a rod of gold, not a reed. Just as the Lord did for Ezekiel, (Ezekiel 40:3) the angel will now do for John. He will measure the heavenly city of God to clarify its perfection and His ownership. From this we will understand the size of the city, its gates and walls. It is then left to our imagination to develop an image in our minds.

16. "The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long."

16.a. - "The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide."

Here we see the city is a square with each side being the same length as its height - like a cube. The King James Version uses the term "foursquare" to describe its shape.

16.b. - "He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long."

A stadia, often called a "Greek Stadia" is a length of measure of about 607 feet. Used in this context 12,000 stadia would mean the New Jerusalem is 1,379.5 miles square, or rounding a bit, about 1,400 miles on each side and 1,400 miles tall. To help us form a mental image of what that means let's compare its size to a few things we're more familiar with:

- By land 1,400 miles is about the distance from Suffolk, Virginia to Houston, Texas.

- It would take the average person about 60 days to walk that distance if they could maintain a steady pace for 8 hours a day.
- Typically the highest clouds we see on earth are about 8,500 feet (1.6 miles) for the fluffy Cumulus clouds and up to 45,000 feet (8.5 miles) for the wispy Cirrus clouds.
- By comparison, the cruising altitude of a commercial airliner is normally about 30,000 to 40,000 feet (6-8 miles).
- That means the height of the New Jerusalem is roughly 175 times higher than the highest clouds you would normally see or the highest altitude an airliner would normally fly.
- Or maybe another more compelling comparison would be the fact our visible atmosphere (the blue sky we see) turns to black space at about 150,000 feet (28 miles). If the New Jerusalem were in that type of atmospheric environment it would mean the top 99% of the city would be in space - in the dark. But fortunately it won't be because the Lord tells us, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (Revelation 21:23). In other words, in God's new creation there will be no darkness at all. Not even at 1,400 miles in the sky.

So, given the dimensions of the city some have asked whether or not it will be large enough to house the hundreds-of-millions of people who have been saved throughout the centuries. Of course the answer is yes because God knows exactly how big it needs to be. But just to satisfy our curiosity, a city 1,400 miles square would consist of approximately 2 million square miles per floor, or about 1.3 billion acres. Compare that to New York City which houses 8.3 million people in only 302 square miles. We have no idea how many "floors" the New Jerusalem will have, but just for perspective, if the ceiling height was 8 feet, like a modern American house, you could conceivably fit 92,400 floors in the cubed city, with each floor being 2 million square miles each. Now...the Bible doesn't tell us this but I provide these comparisons just to help us get our minds around the fact the New Jerusalem is a pretty big place.

Hallelujah!

17. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick." The word cubit is used many times in the Bible. It is an ancient form of anthropometric measurement using parts of the human body to approximate a specific distance. For example, even today we commonly use the measurement of a "foot" to measure distance, and horses are measured in "hands". In the ancient world other measurements were related to the length of a finger joint, the palm of your hand or the stride of a man. In this case a cubit was measured from a person's elbow to the tip of their middle finger. This comes from the Latin word "cubitus" (Greek "paykus" and Hebrew "am-mah") which means elbow. In days before rulers and tape measures these simple measurement terms could be understood and used by anyone. In this case a cubit is approximately 18 inches or 1.5 feet. Using this conversion factor a wall of 144 cubits would be approximately 215 feet thick.

18. "The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass." Here as in verse 11 the Lord helps us picture in our minds the majestic perfection of His dwelling. The walls will be made of jasper,, "...clear as crystal...", and the city itself will be made of gold. Gold that is so perfect it is clear.

19. "The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, 20. the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysalis, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst."

A lot has been written about these stones and what they may mean. All of these opinions are conjecture to some degree so we will stick with the facts just as written. Although the names used to identify these stones may have changed through the centuries they serve to identify the perfection on which God's dwelling place is created. There may be an implied connection between these twelve stones and the twelve stones of priests' breastplates which included several of the same stones. In His instructions for its manufacture God commanded, "Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. The first row shall be carnelian, chrysalite and beryl; the second row shall be turquoise, lapis lazuli and emerald; the third row shall be jacinth, agate and amethyst; the fourth row shall be topaz, onyx and jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings. There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes." (Exodus 28:17-21). Here we see a connection between the twelve foundation stones of the New Testament gospel believers and the twelve ephod stones of the chosen tribes of Israel which were also carved on the twelve gates in the walls. This illustrates the fact that God's kingdom is built on the solid foundation of the gospel as first proclaimed by the twelve apostles. But here we see the foundation layers appear to be made of precious stones; each being a perfect creation of God. Much like the walls of clear jasper and the streets of crystal-like gold the foundation made of twelve different colors of precious stones would reflect and magnify the brilliance of the glory of God. (Revelation 21:11&21). Can you just imagine the blinding radiance of God's glory shining through the walls and foundation of His city in a rainbow of dazzling colors. It is a scene our human minds cannot clearly comprehend. It is the glory of God in all His brilliant splendor. It is the glory John saw in chapter one when he saw Jesus in His divine glory with eyes, "...like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters." (Revelation 1:15). It is the glory John saw at the throne of God with, "...the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne." (Revelation 4:3). It is the glory of a God sung by the heavenly host proclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (Revelation 4:8). It is the face of Moses made radiant by simply being in the presence of God. (Exodus 34:30). It is the church made radiant and holy through its cleansing by Christ. (Ephesians 5:27). It is the glory of the Lord that shone around the angels who announced the long awaited birth of the Messiah shouting, "Glory to God in the highest..." (Luke 2:9-14). It is the Psalmist's proclamation that God has, "...set your glory in the heavens." (Psalms 8:1). It is the undisputed, undeniable and unstoppable glory of God. It is the love and grace and mercy manifest in His dwelling, with His people. It is the glorious light of His power through His Son Jesus, the light cast upon the new creation and refracted in a rainbow of colors through His holy city.

Hallelujah!

21. "The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass."

21.a. - "The temple gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl..."

Of all the building materials listed here, only one (at least in an earthly sense) requires an additional action of creation. In nature, a pearl is the by-product of an injured oyster. If a grain of sand or other potentially dangerous substance becomes lodged in an oyster it will protect itself by forming a multi-layer ring of calcium carbonate around the grain. This becomes a pearl which acts to seal the irritant away from the oyster. Similarly, Christ, through His own blood atoning sacrifice covers us in His grace as an insulating barrier to our sin. Maybe this is an overly poetic thought, but I suspect we will be reminded of Christ's substantial suffering every time we walk through one of those gates.

21.b. - "The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass."

To walk the streets of gold. A thought often cited in lyrics and literature, but here we see it is real. Our feet, glorified in our heavenly form, will walk the hallowed halls of God.

Hallelujah!

LESSON 104

Revelation Chapter 21, Verses 22-27

Quick Recap:

I hope our last lesson was as encouraging for you as it was for me. There we heard (as best as our human minds can understand) John's description of God's eternal dwelling place - the New Jerusalem. The place where we, His redeemed children, will live with Him. We talked about its immense size, its transparent walls, gates and foundations. All made of precious materials so perfect they cannot mask God's radiant glory. We took away from that study an understanding that "heaven" is so much more than puffy clouds or a mysterious spiritual realm. It is a real place, with physical attributes we can scarcely imagine, but a real place indeed. We also saw that the fullness of God's glory is incomprehensible to our human minds as it radiates and reflects through His heavenly creation. But the tantalizing hints given to us by John makes us yearn for the day we will walk its golden streets set on the precious foundation of the gospel truth.

Now, let's conclude chapter 21 and see even more clearly the true essence of heaven.

22. "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.
23. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25. On no day will the gates be shut, for there will be no night there.
26. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

22. "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

22.a. - "I did not see a temple in the city...,"

How can there be no temple? All through the Bible we see references to God's temple; the place where He dwells.

- On earth it was represented by the tabernacle:
 - The place in which God came down to dwell and met with man. The place where God's glory settled on earth. (Exodus 33:9 / 40:34-35).
 - It housed the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place - the Holy of Holies. A sanctuary for God separated from man by a curtain that restricted access to God's most holy place except under specific circumstances. (Exodus 40:3).
 - It was the place where the ark of the covenant was kept, and a place filled with the glory of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:6-11).
- And we also see reference to His temple in heaven:
 - Habakkuk declares, "The Lord is in his temple; let all the earth be silent before him." (Habakkuk 2:20).
 - Isaiah, in a much earlier vision, but one very similar to John's, proclaimed, "I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne, and the train of his robe filled the temple." (Isaiah 6:1).

- To the church at Philadelphia Jesus made a promise we now see fulfilled in Revelation, “The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God...” (Revelation 3:12).
- In his Revelation view John saw the temple several times:
 - “Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in the temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” (Revelation 7:15).
 - “Then God’s temple was opened, and within the temple was seen the ark of his covenant.” (Revelation 11:19).
 - “After that I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple - that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law - and it was opened.” (Revelation 15:5).
 - “Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues.” (Revelation. 15:6)

It seems clear from these references there appears to be a physical temple in heaven. The place where God sits on His throne, where the heavenly ark of the covenant is kept, where angels come and go. But now, in 21:22 John states it is no longer there. The temple he saw so many times in his glorious vision is seen no more. But where did it go? Scripture does not specifically say but there are some clues we can use to understand a different view of God’s temple and why at a point in the future it may not be needed.

- In one sense the earthly temple has already been replaced by the indwelt soul of the believer, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Paul clarifies this even further in his second letter to the Corinthians, “For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16). Does that sound familiar? A time when God will come down and dwell among His people. The time John saw in the future when he said, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” (Revelation 21:3). Just as God promised the Israelites, “I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God and you will be my people.” (Leviticus 26:11-12). Similarly He spoke a promise through Jeremiah, “They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.” (Jeremiah 24:7). Although these promises were largely given to God’s chosen people Israel, they also ring true for His future people. The bride and the guests, who will inhabit His eternal kingdom.
- It appears that in the New Jerusalem God will no longer dwell separated in His temple and there is no longer a curtain separating Him from His people. The need for that separation was removed by Christ (Matthew 27:51 / Luke 23:45). In heaven there is no need for a Most Holy Place to separate God from His sinful people. Instead, there will be no sinful people or sin at all in the New Jerusalem. God will dwell with His people (Revelation 21:3) and they will see His face (Revelation 22:4).

22.b. - "...because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

And when that happens a physical temple - either on earth or in heaven - will no longer be needed. For God Himself, the Lamb and the Spirit will be the temple. Remember, Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us so that where He is we can be also. (John 14: 3). In order to be where He

is does not require us to enter a temple to see Him. For no temple will be needed. We will be totally indwelt and in-place with God, "And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Hallelujah!

23. "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

23.a. - "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it...,"

In the beginning there was light before there was a sun and moon. When God said "Let there be light." (Genesis 1:3) light was given but it was not the sun and the moon because they were not created until the fourth day (Genesis 1:14-19). God's original action separated the light from the darkness but not through natural means. So what light was God talking about? As Paul would later explain, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6). "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." (Colossians 1:13). So this is obviously speaking of a light other than that provided by the sun and the moon.

23.b. - "...for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp."

Jesus is the light, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world." (John 1:4 and 9) Jesus declared this for all time when He proclaimed, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12 / 9:5 / 2 Peter 1:19). God's eternal city will need no external or created light because, "God is light; in him there is no darkness." (1 John 1:5). Isaiah saw a view of this in his prophecy of God's eternal Jerusalem., "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of God rises upon you."..."The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory." (Isaiah 60:1 and 19).

24. "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it."

The "nations" are the inhabitants of the future New Jerusalem. "Ethne" in Greek, which can mean a "multitude living together". No longer will mankind be defined as, "...peoples, multitudes, nations and languages..." (Revelation 17:15), but will instead be all as one people; righteous before God., "...a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9). Isaiah saw this time when, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn." (Isaiah 60:3).

25. "On no day will the gates be shut, for there will be no night there."

Two points seem to be made here; free access and perpetual days.

- Gates that are never shut indicates we will be free to come and go. God will be everywhere and dwelling with us, so we won't have to go to a specific place at a specific time to worship Him. We will be in constant worship because we will be in the constant presence of God. The gates always open is an invitation to come and go from the great city.

- We don't really know what a "day" will be like in heaven. There will be no night (darkness) but there will also be no sun or moon to gauge the time of day. Probably because we will have no need to measure time. By its very nature eternity has no time limits and needs no time measurement. We will not need schedules or deadlines and we'll never have to be at a certain place by a certain time. By using the word "day", but clarifying there is no "night", helps us understand the eternal state of a continuous and unchanging existence.

26 and 27. 26. "The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it." 27. "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Isaiah foresaw a similar condition during the Millennial Kingdom, when Jesus will reign in Jerusalem on a reconstructed earth, "Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day and night, so the people may bring you the wealth of the nations..." (Isaiah 60:11). Now in Revelation 21 John sees the final future state of creation when God will dwell in the new Jerusalem on a recreated earth. An earth with no sin. An earth inhabited only by the Justified (saved), who became Sanctified (spiritually mature) in life, and will now be Glorified in our eternal life. In this state we will have no sin, no temptation of sin, and no ability to sin. But our glorified state will not be the result of anything we have done on our own. Just as we were Justified and Sanctified by faith, our glorified state will be our heavenly condition as a result of the work of Christ. This "...glory and honor..."; the glorification through Jesus and the honor of redeemed saints, will be brought unto God every moment of our eternal lives. Every time we enter the city we will bring our glory and honor with us and lay it before our All Holy God. Never again will we be distracted by life or brought down by sin. We will bring all that we have to the Lord because He will be the source of all we need.

Hallelujah!

LESSON 105

Revelation Chapter 22, Verses 1-5

Looking ahead:

So here we are. Chapter 22; the last chapter of Revelation. It has taken us almost three years to get to this point. A timeframe I never thought possible. In fact when we started chapter 1 I told our class it was not my intention to teach Revelation verse by verse. But by the end of chapter 1 I knew there was no other way. --- So here we are.

Now in chapter 22 John concludes his discussion of heaven. In chapter 21 he gave us a fairly detailed description of the exterior of God's eternal city, the New Jerusalem, to help us understand its size, shape and materials. We also saw how God's glory will shine through and be refracted by its perfect composition. Now John takes us inside the city, which like his description of the exterior is challenging for our human minds to fully understand. But whatever understanding we take away will lift our hearts with the glorious truths of our eternity with the Lord.

Chapter 22 is not only the end of Revelation but it is the end of God's spoken word to man. Years before, a much younger apostle John recorded in his gospel, "This is the disciple [John] who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." (John 21:24-25). But God didn't fill the world with inspired books. Instead, He gave us one book, His holy word, the Bible. A single condensed tome that gloriously chronicles God's supreme authority, creative power and redemptive work, and provides everything we need to know to accept His saving grace. Now, in chapter 22, we come to the end of God's holy word. An ending that as we will see includes His most impassioned plea to mankind.

And with that let's begin our conclusion of the beautiful Book of Revelation.

1. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2. down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4. They will see His face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

1. and 2. - "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb...2. down the middle of the great street of the city."

1.a. - "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal..."

Zechariah foresaw a similar vision, "On that day there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness. It will be a unique day - a day known only to the Lord - with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter. The Lord will be King over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name." (Zechariah 14:6-9). Although this verse speaks to the Second Coming of Christ and the nourishing river that will bring life to Israel and the Millennial Kingdom, it also serves as a preview of what we will see in God's final and eternal Jerusalem. In both cases the water is the source of refreshment for God's faithful followers. Much is said in the Bible about water. In Revelation 21:6-7, the Lord said those who enter His eternal kingdom will be the victorious and the thirsty will have his water "...without cost". The "thirsty" are those of us who recognize our spiritual need and crave nourishment that can only come from God. In the Beatitudes Jesus said these people will be blessed because they, "...thirst for righteousness..." (Matthew 5:6). There He was speaking of those who are not satisfied by the cesspool of contaminated worldly waters, but who, "...come to me and drink...". With the result that, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38). This is the same promise given to the multitudes before the throne in Revelations chapter 7 - those who, "...never again will they thirst." (Revelation 7:16). It is also the promise Jesus made to the Samaritan woman at the well, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."..."Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

(John 4:12-14). This spring of water, the water of life, is the presence of God in our lives through our faith in Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. As the Psalmist declares to God, "For with you is the fountain of life..." (Psalms 36:9), and as Jeremiah proclaimed, God is, "...the spring of living water..." (Jeremiah 2:13). A spring that comes to those who, "...have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:14). For, "...never again will they thirst..."..."For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water." (Revelation 7:16 and 17).

Jesus is our spiritual river of life. He is the living water that wells-up from a dry and parched soul. To wash us clean and nourish our sin-ridden lives. Through Him and only Him will we never thirst again. It is Him alone we must crave -- with all our hearts. It is in Him we must be immersed. It is by Him we must be nourished. It is the Lord who, "...will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." (Isaiah 58:11).

Clearly, Jesus is our water of life, but here John may also be speaking about the role of the Holy Spirit. He references, "...the throne of God and of the Lamb...", but doesn't mention the Holy Spirit - the third part of the Holy Trinity. Some commentators believe the Holy Spirit is represented here by the perfectly clear river of life flowing from the throne. We see an indication of this perspective in John's gospel when Jesus indicates the Spirit of God is the "...water..." that nourishes our redeemed soul. "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit,

whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." (John 7:37-39). But later, when Jesus ascended to heaven He was replaced on earth by the Holy Spirit who was sent to indwell all believers. (Luke 11:13). Jesus confirmed this when He said, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth." (John 14:16-17). "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13). It is the Holy Spirit, the Advocate of God, the Spirit of truth, "...who lives with you and will be in you." (John 14:17). This is how the Holy Spirit indwells in our spirit and brings Jesus into our lives. It is the Holy Spirit who first testified of Jesus when He inspired the words of the prophets and apostles, "For prophecy never had its origins in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21). John expands on this in his first epistle when he spoke of the Holy Spirit being the One who testifies to the truth of Christ through our lives, "And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth." And what does He testify? "...this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." (1 John 5:6 and 11). The water that flows from the throne of God is the water of life, the eternal washing and nourishing for those who have the testimony of Jesus. Those of us who acknowledged the sinful drought of our earthly lives and gave ourselves to the Lord. No longer will we thirst. No longer will we be spiritually dry. For we will be continuously nourished by the Spirit of God.

1.b. & 2.a. - "...flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb...2. down the middle of the great street of the city."

The healing and nourishing waters flow from the throne. Not an oxygen and hydrogen composition we know of as H₂O, but the life giving refreshment of God through the Holy Spirit. This water is not a created element but is God's continual gift to His faithful children of the living waters of an eternal life. We will be in the city because of our earthly faith in Christ, "...with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 10:22). This is what the Psalmist foresaw when he said, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God." (Psalms 46:4). A "river" that makes its way through the streets of the city. Not as physical water flowing over golden pavement, but as a permeating, engulfing and everlasting gift of eternal life flowing over us, from God.

2.b. - "On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

There was a tree of life in the Garden of Eden - the first perfect created place, "In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:9 and 17). And therein lies the proverbial choice of man -- the one commandment. The freewill of man to either be obedient and enjoy eternity with God, or disobey and suffer the consequences of death. God placed both trees in the center of the garden but did not force man to choose either one. He left that decision entirely up to man. Both trees were equally visible and accessible, and both could be eaten from. One tree offered promise and one resulted in sin. One gave life and one took life away. One represented man's choice of God as his eternal Savior and one as his eternal Judge. Man was given free access to both trees and was given the intelligence needed to make the right decision. But mankind failed. Both man and woman, and when they did, 100% of the population of earth opted to disobey God and in doing so fell into sin. By choosing the forbidden fruit mankind fell to temptation and

thereby fell into the curse of God. The curse of death on earth and the risk of eternal damnation unless he repented of what he had done and accepted the grace payment of substitutional death. For his insolence man was banished from God's perfect place and no longer, "...allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." (Genesis 3:22). This shows clearly that man's salvation cannot come from works. The very act of "...reach out his hand..." was an intentional effort of man - a work - on man's part to obtain eternal life through something he could do. But that was not to be. Nothing man could ever do, even reaching for the blessings of eternity was sufficient to regain his place in God's kingdom. That's why Jesus came as the atoning sacrifice. Nothing man could ever do would outweigh the sin he had committed. It was only through Christ and our acceptance of His work on the cross that mankind could once again enjoy the eternal presence of God.

And so there will be a tree of life in heaven - the final perfect created place. Maybe more than one tree because John says the tree stands, "...On each side of the river..." But this may not be a "tree" as we know it on earth, but may represent the eternal gift from God to the people who will dwell with Him for eternity. The tree is fruitful, always giving an endless bounty of "fruit" for God's people. Constantly being renewed, it is always fresh, always available and always sustaining for eternity. Notably, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is absent. There will be no more temptation, no more sin and no need to have a knowledge of evil. It is only the tree of life that is seen in heaven. The tree of life that is a constant refreshment from God for eternity.

Interestingly, the Psalmist also writes of trees representing the righteous people of God, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law [God's word] of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers." (Psalms 1:1-3). Jeremiah saw a similar view of God's people, "They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:8). Although these verses are not directly related to the tree of life in heaven, what more perfect description is there of a resident of God's holy dwelling place. There we will have no fear, no drought, nor the burning stress of life. We will be nourished by the eternal waters of life and bear righteous fruit daily as we meditate on God and continuously worship His holy presence.

3. "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him."

3.a. - "No longer will there be any curse..."

The curse will be gone. The curse that separated the original obedient man from the fallen sinful man. The curse placed on the earth, mankind and satan that was punctuated by the promise of a redeeming Messiah. We see this in the dichotomy of God's prophetic promise, that, "...he [Christ] will crush your head and you [satan] will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15). This promise of redemption came to those who would believe in Christ as a counter to the curse of death for anyone who failed to repent of their sin. God cursed satan to be the lowest, slithering and vile creature of all creation, woman was cursed with pain that would occur during the most beautiful time of her life, man was cursed with toil in order to survive, the earth was cursed with thorns and thistles, and

they were all cursed with eternal death unless atoned by the Lamb. (Genesis 3:16-19). In heaven there will be no curse. All of God's promises and judgment actions will have been fulfilled. The only inhabitants of His eternal kingdom will be those of us who were victorious over our sin through the work of Christ on the cross. Those who thirsted after Him to quench our spiritual needs. (Revelation 21:6-7).

3.b. - "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him." There we will serve God for eternity. It's unclear (at least to me) all of what "serve him" will entail, but whatever it is will be glorious beyond anything we can imagine today. Our service will be continuous, as we praise the Lord who rescued us from an eternity in hell to give us an eternity nourished by the waters of life. It will be service without weariness, service without toil, service without sweat, or pain, or stress, or strain, or any other way we can describe work on earth. It will be the true fulfilment of Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters."

4. "They will see His face, and his name will be on their foreheads."

4.a. - "They will see His face..."

Never a more beautiful thought will ever cross our minds -- the fact we will see God face to face. When we will see the love in His eyes and hear the fountain of His voice. As I said earlier, when I think of heaven and try to imagine what it will be like to stand in awe before our glorious King, I cannot adequately put into words all the amazing thoughts that run through my mind. Can you imagine seeing His face, and hearing His voice and being able to sit in His holy presence while we bask in the brilliant radiance of His glory.

Paul tells us that Jesus is, "...the image of the invisible God..." (Colossians 1:15). He clarifies this to Timothy by explaining, "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see..." (1 Timothy 6:16) God in heaven, in His glorious state, cannot be seen by man in his inglorious state. That's why Jesus came and took on flesh to dwell among us, (John 1:14) in order to be our tangible earthly image of God. But that will change when we, in our glorified state, dwell in the presence of God. There we will see His face. A sight I can scarcely imagine, but a promise in which I can scarcely contain myself. To see the face of God, to bow before Him, to worship Him not only in heart but in sight. What a glorious eternity that will be.

4.b. - "...and his name will be on their foreheads."

We are owned by God. We are His people and His property. Much like the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will testify of Christ during the Tribulation, we will also be marked as God's own. "Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." (Revelation 14:1 / 7:3-4). This is the authentication mark - like a royal seal - bearing witness that we are subjects of, and subject to, God and God alone for eternity.

5. "There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

In chapter 21 John brought to our attention the fact there would be no created or external light in God's eternal world. Instead, Jesus, the Light of the World, reflecting the glory of God will be the light. "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (Revelation 21: 23). How could there ever be night or darkness in a place where we can see God's face? His radiant face like that seen in our Lord's transfigured state, "There he transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." (Matthew 17:2). It is the glory of God seen in the face of Moses when he had been in the Lord's presence, "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken to the Lord." (Exodus 34:29). And amazingly, it will be our radiance as well. The radiant light shining from those who put their faith in Christ Jesus. "Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame." (Psalms 34:5). Paul spoke of the entire church in this way. A church washed in the word by Christ to, "...present her to himself as a radiant church." (Ephesians 5:25-27). But to be clear, the radiance we will have is not our own. It is the reflected glory of Christ who, "...made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6). The radiance of God will light His eternal dwelling. A light reflected in and through His people. Those of us who will serve Him and reign with Him forever.

Hallelujah!!

LESSON 106

Revelation Chapter 22, Verses 6-11

Quick Recap:

In the first part of chapter 22 John concluded his beautiful description of heaven. There he focused primarily on the interior and specifically the area related to God's throne. I think all of us probably wish he had also included a description of the specific "place" Jesus went to prepare for us, but in the big picture that doesn't really matter. Whatever our place looks like in heaven will be more glorious than anything we could ever imagine. In fact, the absence of a description of where we will dwell reminds us that heaven isn't really about us. It's about God. And our reason for going to heaven shouldn't be focused on streets of gold and pearly gates. Our reason for wanting to be there is to be with the Lord.

So given that, it's no surprise the Lord focuses John's attention on the holy and glorious presence of God we see manifest in several ways:

- Revelation 22:1a. - We saw the, "...river of the water of life, as clear as crystal...". As previously discussed, rather than thinking of this as an H₂O based liquid we should see it as the eternal refreshment and nourishment of God - possibly through the Holy Spirit flowing from the throne. We see reference to this in a comment made by Jesus and recorded by a younger John, "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." (John 7:37-39).
- Revelation 22:1b. - The river, ..."flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb..." - It is from here, the seat of God's power and supreme authority, from which the water of life flows throughout the dwelling of God, "...down the middle of the great street...". An expression of God's nourishing love flowing through the city to all the places where we will live.
- Revelation 22:2 - "On each side of the river stood the tree of life..." - Like the original tree of life in Eden, this tree brings eternal life. It bears "...fruit..." bringing God's healing power to His people. Noticeably absent is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that was also in Eden, but was the forbidden source of mankind's fall into sin. No such tree will be in heaven because there will be no sin or the knowledge of evil.
- Revelation 22:3. - "No longer will there be any curse..." - There will be no more curse. The curse imposed by God on man, woman, satan and the earth will be gone. All sin and temptation will be gone as well, leaving only the righteousness of God's people where once there was sin.
- Revelation 22:4 - "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. " - And we will be marked with the name of God. This shows His supreme ownership over those who dwell with Him.
- Revelation 22: 5 - "...for the Lord God will give them light." Revelation. 21:23 "...and the Lamb is its lamp." - Heaven will have no created or external source of light. All the light we will ever need will be provided by the radiant glory of Christ Jesus. Hallelujah!

Beginning in verse 6 I think it's appropriate to view the remainder of Revelation as an epilogue to the book. In fact, it could be viewed as a final epilogue to the entire Bible. In doing so, the Lord

provides both a great promise and final warning. A promise of eternal life for the redeemed, and a warning of destruction for those who are not.

Up to this point Revelation has focused on several key elements:

- The revealing of Christ Jesus as the Divine Judge and Glorious King.
- Christ's timeless message to the church.
- His pre-Tribulation gathering of the church to heaven.
- His end-times focus on redeeming the remnant of Israel.
- Twenty-one horrific judgements that will bring final destruction on satan, unrepentant mankind and God's sin-scarred creation.
- Christ's Post-Tribulation Millennial Kingdom on earth.
- The final judgment of the unredeemed.
- The recreation of the New Heaven, New Earth and New Jerusalem where God will dwell with us for eternity.

Now in verse 6 the tone changes. All of God's actions up through His new creation will be complete. Sin, all sources of sin, and all practitioners of sin will have been eradicated. What will remain is God's perfect re-creation and God's perfected and redeemed people. So now the angel, and then Jesus, turn John's attention to a final calling from the Lord. The affirmation that all that has been said in His word is true, and a final warning for those who will continue to refuse His grace. This final section of Revelation looks back to the beginning, then looks forward to the end of time. After all the words have been said, and all the prophecies have been fulfilled Jesus will declare His coming. An event that promises life, and equally an event that proclaims death. It is the voice of God, one last time, to accept His love.

Now, with that context let's continue chapter 22.

6. "The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place. 7. "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll." 8. I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God! 10. Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophets of this scroll, because the time is near. 11. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy. "

6. "The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

6.a. - "The angel said to me..., "

Throughout Revelation John has seen, heard from and talked to many angels. Starting in chapter 1 we first saw, "The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending an angel to his servant John..." (Revelation 1:1). From that point forward John saw and heard a multitude of angels:

- He saw "The Four Living Creatures". A special angelic being who stay near the throne of God and will assist Christ in release of the Seal judgments. (Revelation 4:6-8).

- There was a "...mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (Revelation 5:2).
- Amazingly he saw and heard, "...the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand..." [hundreds of millions] circling God's throne and singing praises (Revelation 5:11).
- He saw "...four angels standing at the four corners of the earth...", who were holding back judgment until, "...another angel coming up from the east..." could anoint the 144,000. (Revelation 7:1-4).
- He saw, "All the angels were standing around the throne..." (Revelation 7:11).
- He saw, "...seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them." (Revelation 8:2).
- With them was "...another angel, who had a golden censer..." "...who..." "...hurled it on the earth." (Revelation 8:3 and 5).
- John watched as each of the seven angels blew their trumpets of destruction. (Revelation. 8:6-9:21).
- Then he saw, "...another mighty angel coming down from heaven..." with a little scroll and the voice of seven thunders. (Revelation 10:1-4).
- John witnessed as the archangel Michael fought satan and threw him to earth. (Revelation. 12:7).
- John saw three amazing angels "...flying in midair...". One proclaimed the gospel of Jesus to the world, the second declared the destruction of the antichrist's empire Babylon and the third promised destruction to all who rejected God's grace. (Revelation 14:6-9).
- John then saw several angels with Jesus, who with sickle in hand prepared to reap the earth. (Revelation 14:14-20).
- Finally, John, "...saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven plagues..." (Revelation 15:1-16:21). These are the angels who will administer the Bowl judgments -- The final wrath of God.
- One of the angels showed John the destruction of the false religion -- the woman Babylon. (Revelation 17:1).
- Then another angel, with, "...great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor..." as he proclaimed the destruction of Babylon and showed us three woes for its inhabitants; the kings, merchants and sea captains. (Revelation 18:1).
- After this, "...a mighty angel..." threw a boulder into the sea that stopped all sound and all joy in Babylon. (Revelation 18:21).
- Then after, "...what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting..." (Revelation 19:1), John was told by an angel to write down, "...blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:9).
- After the glorious return of Christ John saw, "...an angel standing in the sun..." as he calls the birds of the earth to devour the flesh of those destroyed at Armageddon. (Revelation 19:17).
- John then saw an amazing sight. An, "...angel coming down from heaven...", to capture satan, bind him in chains and throw him in the Abyss. (Revelation 20:1-3).
- Then, "One of the seven angels who had the seven Bowls..." showed John the bride of Christ; the New Jerusalem, and together they measured God's perfect dwelling place. (Revelation 21:9-21).
- And now in chapter 22 the final angelic guide and messenger shows John the last part of his vision. The epilogue of God's glorious word. (Revelation 22:6-21).

I realize that's a lot to review about angels but I felt it was not only a good way to make a whirlwind tour back through Revelation, but to do so through the unique actions of the angels God uses to carry out His commands. Angels we will one day see.

Hallelujah!

6.b.- "These words are trustworthy and true..."

Given that the remainder of Revelation focuses on the final calling from Christ, I believe the angel is not only confirming the validity of this immediate prophecy, but may also be confirming the validity of God's entire spoken word. Jesus Himself declared, "I am the way and the truth and the life...". Bookending the "...truth..." of His words between the "...way..." to God and victory of eternal "...life..." (John 14:6). John further emphasizes the divine role of God's word at the very beginning of his gospel. There reminded us that Jesus is the very "...Word...", that became flesh, and in essence is the living Holy Word of God. (John 1:14).

The undeniable trustworthiness of God and His word is illustrated throughout scripture:

- David declared, "Sovereign Lord, you are God! Your covenant is trustworthy..." (2 Samuel 7:28).
- The Psalmists extols God's trustworthiness in many ways:
 - "The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy..." (Psalms 19:7).
 - "The work of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy..." (Psalms 111:7).
 - "All your commands are trustworthy..." (Psalms 119:86).
 - "The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does." (Psalms 145:13).
- Jesus also made it very clear why His word is so trustworthy by clarifying, "...he who sent me is trustworthy, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." (John 8:26).

Likewise, the truth of God's word is without question:

- "Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is truth." (1 Kings 17:24).
- "I, the Lord, speak the truth; I declare what is right." (Isaiah 45:19b).
- "The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous ordinances is everlasting." (Psalms 119:160).
- "We have seen the glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14b).
- "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is true." (John 17:17).
- "But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. (John 16:13).
- "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." (Luke 21:33).

There are so many other verses we could cite declaring the authenticity and truthfulness of God's holy word. It is a declaration clarified over and over in scripture. We heard this same observation earlier in Revelation when an angel announced the wedding supper of the Lamb and said, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:9). This proclamation was quickly followed by John's description of the glorious return of Christ, "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True." (Revelation 19:11). Of all the terms and titles that could be bestowed on the returning and glorious King, scripture uses the term "...Faithful

and True...". Why? Because it singularly highlights the fact that Christ is faithful to those who follow Him and He is true to the words He has said and the promises He has made. At that future moment in time, when unrepentant mankind is on the brink of disaster, God reminds us that all He has said throughout time is true and will undoubtedly come to pass. He declared this earlier to the church at Philadelphia when He said, "These are the words of him who is faithful and true..." (Revelation 3:7). The words of the, "...Sovereign Lord, holy and true..." (Revelation 15:10), who is the, "...Lord God Almighty, true and just..." (Revelation 16:7).

But why would the angel talking to John at this late point in Revelation stress that fact to him again? Because he knows man will doubt. Man will look at this prophecy and consider it merely symbolic or try to interpret it as something it is not. Or they will deny it as something we're not supposed to understand. Or worse yet, they will distort the truth to suit their own apostate opinions. Peter warns us that, "...in the last days scoffers will come..." (2 Peter 3:3). They will view God's word as fantasy and either question every doctrine, water it down to religious nonsense or deny it altogether. Granted, there are many things in the Bible that to the lost world would seem unbelievable. But the Lord knows that, so when the angel began to describe the fantastic and difficult-to-grasp attributes of heaven he reminded John to tell us who it is who made these things possible. It is, "He who is seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation. 21:5). Even John, who saw Jesus perform so many miracles, who saw Him crucified, who saw Him resurrected and ascend to heaven; even John had to be reminded that what he is seeing and hearing - no matter how unbelievable - is in fact real. How do we know that for sure? Because the angel clarified that it is God, "He who is seated on the throne..." who declares it, and God is always trustworthy and His declared word is always true.

6.c. - "The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

The angel further clarifies this fact by reminding John not only are the images he sees in this vision true, but so were all the words spoken from God through the prophets of old. Peter reminds us that, "...prophecy never had its origins in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21). This statement attests to the accuracy of God's prophetic word, but even beyond that Paul reminds us, "All scripture is God breathed..." (2 Timothy 3:16). A beautiful testament to the authority and authentication of God's word. - That His very breath is true.

Then the angel reminds John he was sent to show us, "...his servants...", the things that must soon take place. The things described in this prophecy that Jesus promised will come true. Many will doubt and set all of this aside as a fairytale, but we, those indwelt by the Spirit know it will come to pass. Peter warns us that scoffed will say, "Where is this coming he promised?" (2 Peter 3:4). They will take the word "...soon..." in this passage and bring doubt to its meaning by questioning why it has not yet happened. But Peter reminds us to be patient, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some would understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9). In other words, the Lord is not slow in coming. The term "...soon..." is to help us understand the urgency of being prepared. The Lord has no clock. He doesn't measure time like we do. Instead, He is

patiently waiting for His servants to tell His story so that as many people as possible will hear the true word, believe and not perish

7. “Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

7.a. - And now the word proclaims the truth of Christ’s imminent return. -- “Look...”, (KJV “Behold”), or “Idou” in Greek which means “to perceive, to see with the mind”. With that, the angel now gets John’s undivided attention.

7.b. - "I am coming soon!"

In one short sentence the angel proclaims both an amazing promise and curse as Jesus declares His final return. This could be speaking of the imminent return of Christ in the pre-Tribulational Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17), or of His return as the Victorious King at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 14:1 / 19:11). But given that He later speaks of a blessing (7c) I believe it probably speaks to the promise of the Rapture. Supporting this is the use of the word “...soon...”, “tachy” in Greek, which doesn’t mean in a short period of time. Instead, it means “quickly”. As in, moving fast, immediate, suddenly and without warning. That’s how Jesus will return at the Rapture. We don’t know the day or the time but we know if it will be swift, “...with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Key to the Raptures imminence is the term “...caught up...”, which in Greek is “harpazo” and can be translated, “to seize, to snatch away, suddenly and decisively”. The fact that the promise of coming “...soon...” doesn’t mean in a short period of time is important to understand. It means that whenever it occurs it will be an immediate action. When Jesus comes at the Rapture it will be sudden and fast and we will be caught up - snatched - to Him without delay. Yet when He comes at the end of the Tribulation it will be as a Warrior set for battle and riding into the fray with His armies in tow. (Revelation 19:11). Here I believe Jesus is reminding us that He is coming for the purpose of gathering His bride. It is an exciting promise of our translation into His presence forever. But for the lost; for those left behind at the Rapture, it is the promise of Tribulation and wrath.

7.c. - "Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

In chapter 1 Jesus promised, “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” (Revelation 1:3). Presumably, those who are now reading chapter 22 verse 7 have read the rest of Revelation up to this point. If they have, then surely they have been blessed by what they have read. The letters to the churches, the early views of God’s throne room, the detailed description of end-times wrath, the continuous offer of God’s mercy and grace, the destruction of sin and the promise of life in God’s glorious and recreated kingdom. All of this is encouraging, but the story of Revelation goes far beyond what we have seen in its 22 chapters. Through our study we have taken a tour through the entire Bible, from Genesis to the end, and we have been able to put scripture in context so we can understand it like never before. But also, we have seen Jesus, the humble Lamb of God, in His role as the Mighty Judge and King. A role of strength and supreme power over all evil. This is the blessing of the, “...one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.” -- We will always “keep” them in our hearts. Through our study we now have an understanding we never had before. We have a new view of Old Testament scripture through its

linkage to end-times events, and hopefully, we have the ability to view current world events in a new and exciting way as we see God's prophetic message unfold. --- Yes! We are blessed by what is, "...written in this scroll..."

8. and 9. - "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9. "But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!"

Now John personally attests to the validity of what he has heard and seen. He probably does this because he realizes how difficult it will be for us to grasp what he is telling us, so he stops his narrative to briefly testify to its accuracy. John made a similar statement near the end of his gospel, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." (John 21:24). But here John succumbs to the emotion of the moment and seemingly overreacts just as he did when the angel showed him the wedding supper of the Lamb. (Revelation 19:10). There, as here, John fell at the feet of the angel to worship. Not because he sought to worship the angel himself but more likely because he was overcome by the emotion of what he saw and fell prostrate to honor the glory of God. We saw a similar reaction when John first saw the judgment character of Christ, "...I fell at his feet as though dead." (Revelation 1:17). In that case it appears he was so overcome he fainted. Now, near the end of his vision, he is overcome again, to the point he falls on his face to worship. But as with the incident in chapter 19 the angel quickly admonishes John to get up and "Worship God!". Reminding John that he, the prophets and all believers are simply servants of the Lord.

10. "Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophets of this scroll, because the time is near."

When Daniel was given a similar end-times vision he was directed to, "...roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end." (Daniel 12:4). The "...time of the end..." refers to the seventieth week of the Lord's prophecy - the Tribulation period. (Daniel 9:24-27). The future time when Daniel's prophecy will be revealed. Now John, who is given the end-times prophecy of the Tribulation - the seventieth week - is told not to seal the scroll. In other words, the time has come to share the narrative given to John, passed through the seven churches, to become what we know today as the Book of Revelation. But it seems this verse may point to more than just this one book. John is told not to seal up, "...the words of the prophets...", which could include other prophetic text throughout the Bible. As we have seen, beginning in Genesis 3:15 much of the Messianic prophecy we see through scripture is directly related to the events in Revelation and the truth of redemption through Christ. I'm confident our study has enabled you to make a connection between scripture that you may not have considered before. It has also given you a broader appreciation for the common thread of prophecy through the Bible. Now John is told not to seal the scroll, because as the end draws near we can begin to see events unfold that will lead to the Tribulation. For example, the nationalization of Israel bringing her people back to the land, the falling away of the church, and the political and economic move towards globalization are all things we now have a much greater appreciation of as they prepare a lost world for the changes ahead.

11. "Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy. "

Here, just prior to the Lord's closing remarks we see a statement of finality. Not only for Revelation but for the whole Bible. From the very beginning God has offered mercy and grace if mankind would simply believe and be obedient. From the first sin-covering sacrifice in the garden until the final sin-covering sacrifice of the Lamb, God has offered an avenue of repentance by which man could be saved from eternal punishment. But as we have seen, man, in large measure, will reject God's offer. So with the imminent approach of the Rapture Jesus gives fair warning. After centuries of freely offered grace mankind will ultimately fall into one of two categories: those who reject - the wrong doing and vile - and those who accept - the right doing and holy. So here, just prior to His final call, the Lord proclaims the final outcome of man's ultimate choice. --
- "...This is what the Sovereign Lord says, Whoever will listen let them listen, and whoever will refuse let them refuse; for they are a rebellious people."
(Ezekiel 3:27 / Daniel 12:10).

LESSON 107

Revelation Chapter 22, Verses 12-17

Quick Recap:

The second part of chapter 22 begins to bring the Bible to a close. Here the angel speaking to John shifts his focus from a description of heaven to a proclamation of Christ's soon return. We learned that the word "...soon..." in Greek does not mean a short period of time. If that were the case people would lose hope in Christ's "...soon..." return because it's been two thousand years since He made that comment. Instead, the Greek word for soon, "tachy", means quickly - moving fast, immediately, suddenly and without warning. Although we have no idea when the Rapture will occur, it will be lightning quick as we are immediately drawn to Jesus in the air. (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).

The angel also focused on the truthfulness and trustworthiness of God's word. Not only the Book of Revelation, but the entire, "...words of prophecy written in this scroll." He reminds John that what he sees and hears is real. It was inspired by God and delivered by His angel so that we would know what is going to take place and therefore be alert and ready. It is this foreknowledge of future events that also gives us assurance in God's supreme authority and power, no matter what craziness we see in the world today. That's because the knowledge we have through His revealed work proves He is always in control - even of the things that have not yet occurred. When the prophet Daniel was given a similar vision he was told to seal it up for a future time. (Daniel 12:10). But here John is told not to seal these words. The time is near and the Lord wants His people to be prepared. This revealing of future truths is one of the true blessings we get from studying Revelation. (Revelation 1:3).

Then we see the Lord's final admonition -- those who do wrong will continue to do wrong, and those who do right will continue to do right. In other words, after thousands of years of freely offered grace and the perfect sacrificial atonement for sin, the day is coming when the option of accepting Christ will be gone.

Now we will move into the remaining verses of Revelation - the Bible's epilogue - a final invitation from Christ and a warning for those who reject.

And with that, let's continue our conclusion of Revelation.

12. "Look, I am coming soon. My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. 13. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." 14. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you the testimony for the churches. I am the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

12. "Look, I am coming soon. My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."

12.a. - "Look, I am coming soon..."

We saw the same proclamation in verse 7 but now it becomes clear Jesus is the one speaking. Despite this divine declaration Peter warns us that in the last days people will deny the coming of Christ, "...scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this coming he promised?'" (2 Peter 3:3-4). They will question the return of Christ because they either doubt the word of God entirely or because they expect it to happen "...soon...". In doing so they misunderstand that "...soon..." is not a measure of time but is a term meaning speed. In other words, when Christ returns at the Rapture it will be swift and immediate. But even if it weren't, Peter also reminds us, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years..." (2 Peter 3:8 / Psalms 90:4). Meaning, God is eternal and does not measure time as we do. Instead, what may seem like a long passage of time to us is actually a beautiful picture of God's patience and grace. Every day, every year and every century Jesus waits to return provides His people another opportunity to carry His message to a lost world. He doesn't wait because He is slow, but because, "...he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9).

The "...coming..." Jesus is talking about here can have two meanings:

- The Rapture - As we've discussed before, many Christians mistakenly view the "Second Coming" as the event when Christ will return to gather His church. But that is not the case. That event is the Rapture. The pre-Tribulational return of Christ to gather His bride - the church - and carry her to the place He has prepared for her. This is the time Paul speaks of when Christ will gather His people to Him (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). An action He has promised so that, "I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon..." (Revelation 3:10-11). The important point to remember here is during the Rapture Jesus does not physically come to the surface of the earth. Instead, we will be, "...caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
- The "Second-Coming" is when Jesus will physically come to earth and place His feet on the ground. That is when the world will see, "...the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion..." (Revelation 14:1 / 19:11 / Job 19:25), and the day when, "...his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem..." (Zechariah 14:4). When that occurs, we - the raptured church - will already be with Him and will return, "...following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." (Revelation 19:14).

Christ's coming at the Rapture will clearly be an eternal reward for believers as the Groom comes to gather His bride, but the Second-Coming will initiate eternal punishment as the Warrior King comes to impose divine judgment. (Revelation 19:11). Given the context describing Christ's coming in this passage, coupled with mention of His "...reward..." leads me to believe He is probably talking about the Rapture. As we'll see in 12b., Jesus will bring a reward to each believer based on our obedience. To me this indicates a return of blessing, not a return of judgment. This is why when Paul spoke about the Rapture to the church at Thessalonica he could say with assurance, "...encourage one another with these words..." (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

12.b. - "My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done." When Jesus returns at the Rapture He will gather His bride - the church - and take her to the place He has prepared for her so that, "...you also may be where I am..." (John 14:3). What an amazing reward that will be. Particularly considering John's glorious description of heaven in chapters 21

and 22. But Paul explains the idea of a reward even further in his letters to the church at Corinth. In a passage sometimes called the "Bema Seat Judgment" or the "Judgment Seat of Christ" it is the time when all believers will be "judged" by the Lord for what we did with our salvation. The term "Bema" comes from the Greek and describes a raised platform where victorious athletes received their rewards, but is also used to describe a place of judgment. In a Biblical sense it will be the evaluation all Raptured believers will go through. It is not a judgment for heaven or hell, because all participants will be those who were saved and all their sin was dealt with at the cross (Ephesians 1:7). Instead, this will be the time when Christ will evaluate how well we applied the gifts and service He gave us during our lives. As Paul explains, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10). These "...things done..." is not speaking of works-based salvation, or salvation based on being good, but is an evaluation of what we did with our life after we were saved. We are all servants of God (Luke 17:10) and we will all be given gifts to use in God's service (Romans 12:4-8), but what we do with those gifts will be the basis of our heavenly reward. Paul speaks to our efforts in Colossians, exhorting us to Godly living as an example of Christ to the world. There he includes a verse that has always spoken to my heart, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." (Colossians 3:23-24). He made a similar comment to the Ephesians, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do..." (Ephesians 6:7-8). Again, this is not speaking of works-based salvation, but of salvation-based works. In other words, it asks what did we do with the gifts and abilities we were given in order to glorify God? In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 Paul talks about the Bema seat judgment. There he speaks to our efforts being tested by fire. These are the efforts we make to share the gospel or by using our abilities to build up the body of Christ. He implores us to, "...build with care...", and uses the terms "...gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw..." to represent the things we do. When exposed to God's judgment (the fire) some of our efforts will come through, as with gold in the refiners fire, but other things will be burned up like wood, hay or straw. When this occurs our, "...work will be shown for what it is, because the Day [the day of the judgment seat] will bring it to light. It will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames." (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Again, do not confuse this with the false doctrine of works-based salvation. The things being tested here are not things done to somehow earn salvation, but are the fruits of our salvation. Also, don't confuse this "judgment" with the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11). That judgment is reserved for those who refused God's grace and are therefore being sentenced to death in hell. The Bema Seat Judgment will be for all believers, who after the Rapture will be evaluated for our obedience and service and rewarded for what we did for the glory of the Lord. This is what Jesus will, "...give to each person according to what they have done." (12.b.) What will this reward be? Frankly I'm not sure, but I suspect whatever it is we will lay it at the feet of our King that He and He alone will be glorified. As with the crowns of the Twenty-Four Elders we will, "...lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'" (Revelation 4:10-11).

13. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

As He did earlier in Revelation 1:8, 1:17 and 21:6, Jesus affirms He is the source of and ultimate authority over all things. He was there at the beginning (Genesis 1:1 / Psalms 102:25 / John 1:1-14) and here He defines what will happen at the very end. Isaiah proclaimed God's eternal omniscience and supreme authority when he said, "Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, "My purpose will stand." (Isaiah 46:9-10). In both passages Jesus clarifies His role as the ultimate and supreme authority. He is fully God and as such, "...was with God [the Father] in the beginning..." and, "...without him [Jesus] nothing was made..." (John 1:2). Now here in Revelation He also makes, "...known the end..." and "...what is still to come...". In other words, we know without a doubt that God controls the future because He has already told us what will occur. That's why the book of Revelation is so important for every Christian to understand.

14. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."

14.a. - "Blessed are those who wash their robes,..."

Here Jesus speaks of all believers; those who, "...wash their robes...". Those who have been cleansed and remade through their faith in God's grace and, "...with the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:19). It is those who will return victorious with Him, "...riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean..." (Revelation 19:14 / 7:9). He is speaking of the bride who, "...has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. - Fine linen stands for the righteous acts God's holy people. " (Revelation 19:8).

14.b. - "...that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."

And to those who are washed and redeemed; those who through faith in Christ will inherit eternity with Him, He gives life. "To the one who is victorious, I will give the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7). The tree that brings life and, "...healing of the nations..." (Revelation 22:2). It is life everlasting lived with God, in, "...the city...", the holy dwelling of God, with its open gates of pearl leading to our eternal home. (Revelation. 21:2 / 13 / 21 / 25).

It is into that place that we - true believers - will be with the Lord forever.

Hallelujah!

15. "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

We have all sinned and may have even done some of the things listed in this verse. Jesus is not saying people who have committed these sins will go to hell. Instead, He is using this list to characterize the nature of those who reject Christ's offer of salvation. It is a way of contrasting the lost in this verse with those, "...who wash their robes,..." in verse 14. Here He clarifies that those who reject Christ will have another eternal outcome. They will be, "...thrown into the lake of fire..." where they will be in torment forever (Revelation 20:15).

Here, at the very end of Revelation, at the very end of His written word, and just before His final impassioned plea Jesus provides one more warning. He clearly segregates the redeemed from the unredeemed, the saved from the lost. Those who have rejected the grace of God from those who have accepted it. In doing so He clearly explains who will and will not inherit the kingdom of God. If all other explanations have failed He is now being crystal clear --- in which camp do you reside, those washed in righteousness or those filthy in sin?

16. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you the testimony for the churches. I am the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

And now at the end Jesus goes back to the beginning. In chapter 1 John declares this book to be, "The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw - that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 1:1-2). Now at the end of the book Jesus validates it is He who sent the angel to share the vision with John. But in this context His reference to "...my angel..." may have a second meaning. In chapter 1 John was instructed to, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches; to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodica." (Revelation 1:11). There John saw Jesus holding seven stars in His hand as He stood among seven lampstands. (Revelation 1:13-16). He then clarifies that the seven lampstands are the seven churches and the seven stars, "...are the angels of the seven churches...". (Revelation 1:20). It is these seven churches and their leaders who are commissioned to carry the Revelation of Christ to the world. These seven churches represent the characteristics of the "church" - the Body - over time. All were tasked to be a light to the world, but only two - Smyrna and Philadelphia were faithful. The rest, as we see today in apostate denominations and religions, fell away from God into sin. The vision John recorded here became what we now know as the Book of Revelation. The revealing of judgment, and the unveiling of Christ Jesus as the Victorious King. Here He confirms again who is in ultimate and supreme authority. He is "...the Root and Offspring of David..." identifying Himself with the Jewish people, the Messiah on David's forever throne. (2 Samuel 7:12-16 / Matthew 1:6 / 2 Timothy 2:8). But He is also, "...the Bright Morning Star...". The first star of the day and the brightest in the sky. (Revelation 2:28). He is, "...a light, shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (2 Peter 1:19). It is a beautiful and fitting validation that Jesus is the King of All.

Hallelujah!

LESSON 108

Revelation Chapter 22, Verses 17-21

The last lesson...

Quick Recap:

In verse 12 Jesus made a profound declaration, "Behold, I am coming soon!" With this announcement the Lord begins to bring both Revelation and the entire Bible to a close. In doing so He reminds us the time is near when He will return to gather His bride - the church - and take her to be with Him (John 14:3). The promise of His coming is coupled with a promised reward. This speaks to me of the Rapture. A time of great triumph for both Jesus and His faithful followers. A time when He removes us from the earth in order to, "...keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world..." (Revelation 3:10). This is not an ordinary promise, but one that comes from, "...the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:13). There are titles that confirm the Lord's supreme authority as the One who created all things and the One who will now judge His entire creation.

Jesus then declares a blessing and a curse. The blessing is on those who, "...wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14). These are the believers - us - who have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb and who will dwell with the Lord forever. (Revelation 22:4). But Jesus contrasts His followers with those who are "...outside ..." (Revelation 22:15). These are the remainder of humanity, who across the centuries of time failed to accept the grace of God through the Messianic promise or through faith in Christ as their King. He characterizes these by a list of their sins, but it is not the sins themselves that convict them. It is the fact their sins were never confessed through faith in the work of Christ on the cross so that their souls may be redeemed. It is this dichotomy, between the washed and unwashed, the redeemed and unredeemed that separates those of us who will spend an eternity with the Lord from those who will be forever separated from Him in hell.

Jesus then reminds us it was Him who sent the angel to give John this prophecy. A message that would be forwarded by him to the seven churches of Asia Minor, and through them be spread to all the world. (Matthew. 28:19 / Acts 1:8). But sadly, the majority of those churches fell into sin and failed in their role as messengers. So God's revealing prophecy, through John, became part of His conical word that is in our hands today. The word from God that gives us a view of the future, and in doing so assures us that our Lord and King is in total control. We know this from the simple fact He is able to tell us in detail what will happen in the future. In doing so He assures us that He has a plan, from beginning to end, that will not change, and will happen exactly as He says, "Remember this, keep it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come." (Isaiah 46:8-10).

The Lord closes this passage by reminding us that He is the, "...Root and the Offspring of David...". The divine one John saw as, "...the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David..." (Revelation 5:5). A clear Messianic affirmation that Jesus remains committed to His unchanging

covenant with Israel. We also see this in Isaiah's declaration of Christ's role as the earthly descendent of David, the promised Messianic King and the end-times Righteous Judge, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord — and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist." (Isaiah 11:1-5). But here He also reminds us that He is, "...the Bright Morning Star..."; the one who is the light of the world to the Gentiles as well (Revelation 22:16). A promise He made to the messenger church at Thyatira if they would be faithful, "I will also give that one the morning star." (Revelation 2:28), who, "...rises in your hearts." (2 Peter 1:19). The combination of these titles expresses God's grace to all so that the whole world through Christ might be saved. (John 3:17). Paul further explains this connection when he says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." (Romans 15:12 - quoting Isaiah 11:10).

And now the Lord brings His word to a close. In doing so He makes a final impassioned plea to come to Him as the source of eternal salvation.

17. "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. 18. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. 20. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus. 21. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."

17. "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life."

I believe this verse can be viewed from two perspectives. First, the Holy Spirit and the church cry out to Jesus to come. They call out to everyone to come to Christ, yet at the same time the request appears to come from Jesus who at the very end of His holy word is calling out to all mankind to come accept His free gift of salvation. It is an impassioned plea echoed by the heavenly host and the witness of believers. It is a call to all who hear and a promise to those who will believe. It is a passage that when held deeply in our hearts expresses a passionate yearning to be with our Lord.

17.a. - "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"..."

The Holy Spirit and the "...bride..." - the church - call out together. The Holy Spirit is God just as the Father and Son are God. Yet it is the Holy Spirit who was sent by God to dwell within each believer, and collectively to dwell within the church - the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 6:19 / 1 Corinthians 12:13 / John 14:15). He is our Advocate and Comforter who brings us God's truth in a confusing world. (John 14:20). He is with us to, "...teach you all things

and will remind you of everything I have said to you...". (John 14:26). Here, the Holy Spirit and the bride call out to Jesus in unity. (Revelation 19:7-8). Seemingly as one voice in concert they declare, "...Come!...". A cry to Jesus to return. A calling to the Lord to bring an end to the sin-ridden world and to take His place as our glorious King for eternity. But at the same time it could also be a final call to the loss of mankind to come to Jesus as the only true source of salvation. The Holy Spirit and the bride are proclaiming that Jesus is the way, through the truth, to the life. (John 14:6). They call for Him to come. After centuries of man's rejection the Holy Spirit, who has called out to billions of lost souls, and the bride, who has suffered centuries of persecution, bear witness to the saving power of Jesus and call to those who need to come to Him. A calling to those who are running out of time. And yet at the same time it is a calling to the Lord. A yearning for Him to gather His bride and take her with Him into eternity. In either case the message is clear; the time to come to Christ is now because the time of His coming is soon.

17.b. - "...And let the one who hears say, 'Come!'..."

This is a call from those who heard and believed. The phrase, "...let the one..." excludes no one. It is God's offer of unconditional grace to anyone and everyone who hears and accepts the truth of the gospel. There are no other qualifiers. There are no justifying acts of work or practices of "religion". It is simply a picture of one who hears the gospel truth and accepts it to the point of crying out to Jesus to "Come!" To come into their heart, to come be King of their lives, to come and rescue them from a world of sin. Paul speaks to this in a beautiful verse given to the church at Rome, "For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Romans 10:12-15). Not only does this verse speak to the one who hears, but it shows the importance of the one who carries the good news for them to hear. For if they do not hear they cannot believe, and if they do not believe they will never call out to Jesus. But those who hear and heed the gospel will implore Jesus to "Come!".

17.c. - Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes to take the free gift of the water of life."

In chapter 21 we discussed Christ's promise to those who thirst, "To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children." (Revelation 21:6c-7). In discussing that passage we learned that a Biblical perspective of "thirst" takes on a much greater meaning than we would normally think. It speaks to our intense and gnawing need for something critically important to our very existence. Spiritual thirst is our yearning and insatiable need for Jesus. We see this more clearly in the original Greek word for "thirst", "dipsonti", which is described as: "an intense desire", "to painfully long for something.", "to desire being refreshed by it", "to desire being supported by it", "to be strengthened through it." In other words it is our recognition of a great need. Looking at it this way gives us a sense of what it means to thirst, crave and long for the very presence of the Lord in their life. And as we do we realize that "knowing" Jesus and "thirsting" for Jesus are two different things. "Knowing" Jesus is mental, but "thirsting" for Jesus is spiritual. We see this difference in the Beatitudes where Jesus said blessed are those who, "...thirst for righteousness..." (Matthew 5:6). He is speaking of those who cannot be nourished by the contaminated waters of the world but turn to Him for the waters of life. It is also those to whom

Jesus promised, "...come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." (John 7:37-38). And it is the same promise given to the multitudes before the throne. Those who, "...never again will they thirst." (Revelation 7:16). This is the eternally quenching water Jesus offered during His beautiful conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."..."Everyone who drinks this water [speaking of her well] will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:12-14).

But more importantly, we now see it is the thirsty who will inherit the Kingdom of God. The spiritually thirsty. Not those whose faith seeks quick refreshment, but those who crave the Lord. Those who understand the desperation of life without His living waters. Those who need, want and crave the presence of Christ every moment and recognize their life is dry and parched without Him. It is those who truly seek His "...free gift of the water of life..." The gift of God's grace purchased on the cross by Jesus. It is a call to everyone to, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters: and you who have no money." (Isaiah 55:1). It must be free because you cannot buy salvation. Either through money, or works, or deeds or even through religion. It is a pre-paid gift offered to anyone who will accept what the Payer has already done. It costs us nothing because the price was paid on the cross through the blood of the Lamb.

Frankly, I fail to find words worthy to describe this gift because I cannot adequately describe the deep-seated yearning I have for Christ in my life. So I will let the scripture speak for itself as only scripture can:

- "As a deer pants for streams of water, so my souls pants for You, my God." (Psalms 42:1).
- "I spread out my hands to You; I thirst for You like a parched land." (Psalms 143:6).
- "You, God, are my God, earnestly I see You: I thirst for You; my whole being belongs to You, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld Your power and glory. Because Your love is better than life, my lips will glorify You." (Psalms 63:1-3).

But we must ask ourselves; is this who we are? Do we truly thirst for Jesus every day or is He just a Sunday morning glass of water? Are we immersed in Him? Are we nourished by Him? Do we recognize our parched condition and see Him - not the world - as the quenching water of life? I don't believe these questions are just for the lost. I believe they are questions every believer must ask ourselves every day. We cannot allow the stresses and struggles of life to spiritually drain and dehydrate us. Instead, we must come continually to the Spring to drink the refreshment that comes only from our faith in Jesus. --- And when we do, our hearts will continually declare, "Come!"

18. - 19. "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." 19. "And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

One of the reasons I take teaching God's word so seriously is a warning given to us through James, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1). I interpret that to mean that someday I will be

held accountable for the way I handled God's word. That's why I spend hours prayerfully pouring over scripture, studying each lesson verse by verse, or even word by word, making connections across passages, between books and across testaments, and all while earnestly seeking to understand the context and intent. I do this so that I can be obedient in my role as a teacher. That's because as a teacher I accept the role of guiding God's people through His word, and when I do, I must do everything in my power to be as accurate a guide as I can possibly be. Paul brings weight to this when he says, "All Scripture is God-breathed..." (2 Timothy 3:16a). In other words, we hold in our hands the very words of our Almighty God. The words that began when God gave Moses the Law and the original holy texts. Then, as now, He gives us the same basic warning, "Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God I give you." (Deuteronomy 4:1-2 / 12:32 / Proverbs 30:6). These words must be handled with care. Not interpreted to say what we want them to say, but dutifully studied so we can help others understand -- to the best of our ability -- what God intended for us to understand. Why is this so important? Because Paul also tells us God's word is, "...useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16b-17). It is through God's word that we draw closer to God as we walk through life illuminated by the fact, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path." (Psalms 119:105). It is the manual by which we live and the path by which we walk.

Every false doctrine is the result of false teaching. Whether it is the popular prosperity gospel, or any other denominational slant that veers away from God's word, it is spread by false teachers who spread a false message. Paul warns of this when he said, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, [salvation through Christ alone] let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:8-9). So how does this apply to verses 18 and 19? Because those who present a false gospel, or those denominations, teachers, preachers or commentators who have taken from or added to God's word are guilty of altering what He gave us. And when that happens there are severe consequences; namely, "...the plagues described in this book..." and the eternal loss of, "...his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book."

20. "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus." Jesus repeats His earlier promise from verse 7. A promise that we learned does not measure time but indicates swiftness. When Jesus proclaims His coming it is immediately met with affirmation, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus." In its Semitic form the word "...Amen..." can mean "firm" or "to be reliable" or "the truth". It is often the word Jesus uses to express the truth of His words when He says, "Verily" or "Truly I say". In other words, here there is an immediate recognition that what Jesus says is "firm", it is "reliable", and it is "true". Here, Jesus, the Word that became flesh (John 1:14) testifies to the truth of His word and the events we have so carefully studied.

21. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."

This is what God's entire word is about -- His grace. His free gift of eternal life for any and all who accept and believe in His glorious work on the cross. It is through this grace that we find salvation, and it is through our salvation that we become, "...God's people...".

"Amen. Come Lord Jesus."

Closing thought...

With this lesson we complete our study of Revelation. As we do I am humbled at the very thought that our All Holy God would allow a sinner like me - saved through grace by my Savior on the cross - the honor of teaching His Holy Word. It is more than I can fathom and brings me to my knees in a gratitude I cannot adequately express. My only request is that God will forgive me for any mistakes I may have made or inaccuracies I may have unintentionally expressed. I pray these lessons will glorify our Lord by helping others come to love the Book of Revelation as we have.

Hallelujah.

We love y'all,
Mike and Erica