

COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

BY

DONALD R. TAYLOR

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FOREWORD

I have had many opportunities to teach the Book of Revelation in Bible classes where I have served as minister, and have discussed different portions of the book with numerous individuals. On each occasion I have been impressed with the fact that for one to properly understand a *part* of the book he must have a valid view of the book as a whole. To fail in this is to build houses on sand and usually to miss the real point of the verse or passage being considered. I have therefore acceded to repeated requests by students and have written my class notes in commentary form, hoping to fill a need so often felt.

The views expressed in this book may be at variance with those of the reader. Since I do not claim any special merit other than diligent study I am not offended if one disagrees with me. I simply urge the reader to study in a conscientious manner one of the most interesting books of the Bible. These notes may be of value to you.

Donald R. Taylor
Magnolia Bible College
October 28, 1981

DEDICATION

*This book is lovingly dedicated to my wife,
Virginia, who has encouraged me to finally get it
finished, and to the church of Christ which, through
faith, has weathered many trials. With God's help,
final and complete victory will be ours!*

COMMENDATIONS

John was commanded, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (Revelation 10:4). Many consider the whole book of Revelation to be a sealed book whose meaning is forever locked up in obscurity. And that is a great pity; for the Revelation has a very clear and pertinent message for Christians in our time.

The book is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" as is stated in the book itself (1:1). It is Christ himself who both reveals and is revealed. That was the need of the day when the book was written: not a revelation of the history of the world for the next two millenniums; not a revelation of a future apostasy to be dealt with a thousand years hence; not even a detailed record of events to come at the end of time. But a revelation of Jesus Christ, the Christian's Lord; not "Lord Caesar," but "Lord Christ"; the crucified, but conquering Lamb; victorious over death, Satan, and the present persecuting power.

And that is the book's message, as ably demonstrated by Don Taylor, faculty member of Magnolia Bible College, in this *Commentary on Revelation*. It is a message we need today as we face an unbelieving and increasingly hostile, seemingly overwhelming world.

Even if you differ in your opinion on the interpretation of details, you will find this commentary and study guide helpful and challenging, and, I believe you will agree, true to the Revelation's basic thrust and purpose.

Don Taylor is well-qualified by training, experience, and ability to teach the Bible, whether in the classroom or in print. I commend both the man and the commentary to you.

Cecil May, Jr., President
Magnolia Bible College
Kosciusko, Mississippi

COMMENDATIONS

Can we survive this present evil and hostile world? The Christian is given a present, continuing and future victory through his faith and by the strength of that more powerful one who is in him (I John 4:4; 5:4). The theme of Revelation is the victory of the Kingdom of God, for "if God is for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31)? We have hardly seen a day when the message of God's glory, power, and victory was more needed!

The author of this book is well qualified to give an exposition on Revelation and to write on victory over discouraging circumstances and opposition forces. He is qualified by formal education, experience and personal study. He majored in Bible and minored in Biblical Languages at Freed-Hardeman College and at Harding College, worked ten years as a missionary preacher and teacher in Belgium and three years in Montreal, Canada, and received the M.A. degree in French and Spanish from the University of Southern Mississippi where he is now well into his doctoral program in Comparative Literature. He has done mission work in southern Mississippi for several years and is a teacher and coordinator of the missionary training program at Magnolia Bible College, Kosciusko, Mississippi. He taught at David Lipscomb College 1970-72. He is a dedicated servant with a happy serving Christian wife and three children.

The form of this book makes it very useful for personal study or a class study guide. It features a structural outline worked into the exposition and chapter and verse references at the top of each page. The expository comments are based upon much prayerful and objective exegetical study, and they are brief, simply stated and to the point. These thoughts have been refined many times.

COMMENDATIONS

A study of this commentary will bring you much enlightenment, the joy of learning and the peace and comfort of a confident outlook for now and the future. It will profit the scholar and the very unlearned student. Study this book; it will help you to enjoy your victory in Christ.

Bill Lambert, Academic Dean
Magnolia Bible College
October 29, 1981

A STATEMENT FROM THE PUBLISHER

Many commentaries have been written on the Book of Revelation with numerous views expressed. So much attention has been given to this book because it is such a fascinating one. It is intriguing and challenging, automatically calling attention to itself. Having been written in such figurative language, it can be easily interpreted or mis-interpreted in all kinds of directions.

Some have taken the figurative passages and translated them into literal meanings. Others have taken this book out of its first century setting and transferred it to a later period or even to some time that is yet in the future.

Denominational preachers like to go to this book during their meetings and crusades for texts on "The Mark of the Beast", "The Battle of Armageddon", and so on. They have applied the Mark of the Beast to Hitler and to many other tyrants and villains of the past and present. With every new conflict in the Middle-East they are sure that the battle of Armageddon is going to take place just any time. And they have been thinking that for many many generations. Yet, somehow preachers continue to interest their audiences in these things.

There are those who go to Revelation in an attempt to teach such doctrines as Premillennialism, the Rapture, and that only 144,000 will be saved. Of course this inspired book of God does not teach such things and the reader is advised to search the scriptures diligently to know what the Bible really says on these and other matters.

Some think that the Book of Revelation is the most difficult book in the Bible. For this reason, many never read and study it. They are afraid of it. Others claim that it is the easiest book to understand in all of God's word. Actually, it is somewhere between those two extremes. It

PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

is a good book, a wonderful book, and is probably much easier to understand than one might realize, provided he will take the time to study it along with the rest of the scripture, and in view of the time it was written, and history itself. In that case it will usually explain itself.

Surely God did not give us a message that we cannot understand at all. I would classify Revelation as a book for the Christian to grow on.

I am delighted to be the publisher of Brother Don Taylor's commentary on Revelation. I doubt very seriously that all will agree with all of his statements and conclusions, and the same can be said about all other such commentaries, but this material has been written and it is being published to encourage further study of this important portion of God's word. It is fresh, concise, and informative. I believe that all who will read it will appreciate it.

Brother Taylor is well educated, has served as a missionary in Belgium and Canada, has preached for several churches in the States, and is presently teaching in Magnolia Bible College in Kosciusko, Mississippi. I personally count him as my friend and brother in Christ and a man that I appreciate and respect.

I would like to commend Brother Taylor and his commentary to you.

J. C. Choate
Winona, Mississippi
August 18, 1981

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INTRODUCTION

The English word *Revelation* translates the Greek word *apocalypse*. The word literally means an unveiling or revealing of something. This word also indicates a style of writing, common enough among the Jews of the first century, in which symbols were profusely used. The symbols were sometimes, though not always, explained, as the writers assumed that their readers understood the meaning of the symbols. The word *apocalypse* does not of itself indicate predictive prophecy, although in the case of John's Revelation such does figure prominently. An *apocalypse* could just as well be historical in nature, the recounting of something which had already taken place. Even in the New Testament Revelation there are many passages which are historical though written in the "apocalyptic" style.

It is obvious that events which had already transpired before John wrote the Revelation, and which are therein recorded, must be distinguished from the predictive part of the book. The first five chapters fall by and large into this historical category, although the contents are described in apocalyptic literary style. Then there are elements in the succeeding chapters which would also be placed in the category of events already transpired.

But where do we draw the line between the apocalyptic recounting of history and the predictive prophecy which doubtless forms a large portion of the book? I think John himself gives the answer to this question when he writes of the "seven kings" (Revelation 17:10-11). Says John, "They are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while." If we can determine who the "one" is in this passage we can learn the approximate

date of the book's composition. The reader is asked to turn to my comments on Revelation 17:10-11 where he will learn my reasons for thinking that this "one" who was then ruling in Rome was Vespasian. It seems logical to me that John wrote the book sometime during Vespasian's reign, or since the "seven kings" are presented as succeeding one another without any linear interruption, it is possible that John wrote shortly after Nero's death but before Vespasian actually began his reign. The threat of retribution to the Jews of Smyrna seems to indicate that they were also soon to be persecuted. This would correspond to the Roman persecution of the Jews about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and shortly thereafter. Since we cannot pinpoint the exact time during the nine year reign, we must avoid being dogmatic about certain points of interpretation.

We can, however, be certain that the "eighth" king had not yet come (Revelation 17:11). This eighth king, Domitian (if we are correct), reigning A. D. 81-96, was going to embody the authority and persecuting power of the sea-beast, and would "war against the Lamb" (17:11-14). The message of the Revelation is for God's people to remain firm in their faith and not grow discouraged before the onslaught of renewed persecution. Ultimately they would be victorious through faith in Christ.

Many commentators hold that John wrote the Revelation in approximately 96 A. D. They base this opinion on a statement made by Ireneus, a Christian writer of the second century, which they interpret as meaning that John saw his visions in the end of Domitian's reign. This Domitian is thought to be the Roman emperor whose reign ended in A. D. 96. However, Ireneus' statement is sufficiently unclear and so far removed from the time of John's life that we can with reason question the usual interpretation made of it. For example, it is possible that

instead of indicating *Domitian* (A. D. 96), Ireneus actually meant Domitius, which could have been Nero, for he is often called by this family name. Furthermore, the original Greek of Ireneus' statement could just as well mean that *John* was seen "almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign," and not that his vision was seen then. (Cf. Ireneus, *Against Heresies*, Book 5, chapter 30:3). Ireneus was arguing that if the identity of the Antichrist were important John would have told them for he was alive and seen (Greek: *Heorathē*) among the Christians even as late as the end of Domitian's reign. I have assumed, for argument's sake, that Domitian was meant instead of Domitius (Nero), but whichever be the case, it is clearly not an open and shut case for the late date theory. It remains impossible to establish the date of the Revelation from external evidence. It appears to me that the line of argument we have developed, based on Revelation 17: 10-11, goes further toward limiting the period during which the book was written than does any other method.

The author of the Revelation is John, a "servant" of God (1:1). He is one "who bare witness of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw" (1:2). This description makes it obvious that the author was the apostle John, for it was the task of an apostle to bear witness to Christ (Acts 1:8). The expression "even of all things that he saw" appears to refer, not to the visions contained in the Revelation, but to the resurrection of Christ in particular, of which John was a witness. John stood with Peter before the high priest and the council and boldly declared, "We cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard" (Acts 4:20). This same continued emphasis on the testimony he gave to Christ is found in the gospel (John 21:24), and John's first Epistle (I John 1:1-4).

When John wrote the Revelation he was on the barren island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, perhaps in exile because of his fearless preaching of the gospel.

OUTLINE OF THE REVELATION

Prologue (1:1-3)

Salutation and Address (1:4-6)

Introductory Vision (1:7-20)

I. LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES (Chapters 2-3)

A. Ephesus (2:1-7)

B. Smyrna (2:8-11)

C. Pergamum (2:12-17)

D. Thyatira (2:18-29)

E. Sardis (3:1-6)

F. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

G. Laodicea (3:14-22)

II. GOD ON THE THRONE (Chapters 4-5)

A. God is worshipped (Chapter 4)

B. The Lamb is worshipped (Chapter 5)

III. SEVEN SEALS (6:1 - 8:1)

A. First Seal: White Horse (6:1-2)

B. Second Seal: Red Horse (6:3-4)

C. Third Seal: Black Horse (6:5-6)

D. Fourth Seal: Pale Horse (6:7-8)

E. Fifth Seal: Saints under the Altar (6:9-11)

F. Sixth Seal: Great Earthquake (6:12-17)

G. Intermission of Hope (7:1-17)

1. 144,000 sealed (7:1-8)

2. The Great Multitude (7:9-17)

H. Seventh Seal: Silence introducing the seven trumpets (8:1)

IV. SEVEN TRUMPETS (8:2 - 11:19)

A. Angel with Golden Censer (8:2-5)

B. The Trumpets (8:6 - 11:19)

1. First Trumpet (8:7)
2. Second Trumpet (8:8-9)
3. Third Trumpet (8:10-11)
4. Fourth Trumpet (8:12-13)
5. Fifth Trumpet: FIRST WOE (9:1-12)
6. Sixth Trumpet: SECOND WOE (9:13-21)
7. Intermission (10:1 - 11:13)

a. The mighty angel with the little book (10:1-11)

b. The temple is measured (11:1-2)

c. The two Witnesses (11:3-13)

8. Seventh Trumpet: THIRD WOE (11:14-19)

V. WAR IN HEAVEN (Chapter 12)**VI. TWO BEASTS (Chapter 13)**

A. The Beast from the Sea (13:1-10)

B. The Beast from the Land (13:11-18)

VII. THE LAMB ON MOUNT SION (Chapter 14)**VIII. SEVEN PLAGUES (15:1 - 16:21)**

A. Introductory VISION OF VICTORY (Chapter 15)

B. The Bowls of Wrath (Chapter 16)

1. First Bowl (16:2)
2. Second Bowl (16:3)
3. Third Bowl (16:4-7)
4. Fourth Bowl (16:8-9)
5. Fifth Bowl (16:10-11)
6. Sixth Bowl (16:12-16)
7. Seventh Bowl (16:17-21)

IX. THE GREAT HARLOT (Chapters 17-18)

X. THE TWO SUPPERS (Chapter 19)

- A. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb (19:1-10)
- B. The Supper of the Great God (19:11-21)

XI. THE FINAL VICTORY (Chapter 20)

- A. Reigning with Christ (20:1-6)
- B. Satan cast into Hades (20:7-10)
- C. Final Judgment (20:11-15)

XII. NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH (Chapters 21-22)

- A. The New Jerusalem (21:1 - 22:5)
- B. Epilogue (22:6-17)
- C. Conclusion (22:18-21)

**A COMMENTARY ON
THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

**Based On The Text Of
The American Standard Version**

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 1

[1:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Go back and study the references to the “kingdom” during Jesus’ ministry and in the epistles of Paul and Peter. They show that the kingdom and the church are one and the same institution, and thus that the kingdom was already in existence when John wrote the Revelation.

2. Look up on a map of Asia Minor the locations of the churches and memorize where they were.

3. Study the divine personage whom John saw and consider his priestly garments. He stands at the beginning of the Revelation as the High Priest who will officiate at the offering of the blood of the martyrs in the Holy Place (cf. Revelation 6:9-11).

PROLOGUE (1:1-3)

Verse 1 — The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John;

The Revelation came from God, was given to Christ, sent to John by an angel, and written by John to Christians. It was to “reveal” things *soon to take place*. The book was not to be understood as an historical preview of so-called Christendom from then to the end of time.

Verse 2 – who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw.

The writer identifies himself as one who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus. This seems to be a reference to John 21:24 and would identify the writer as being the same man who wrote the Gospel of John.

Verse 3 – Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Inasmuch as there was often only one copy of an apostolic letter or book in the possession of a congregation, one man read aloud the particular book. A blessing is pronounced upon this person who “reads” and on those who hear him read, provided they “keep the things that are written therein.” To “keep it” means to remember it and do as the book exhorts. The reason for this urgency is that “the time” of the fulfillment of the prophecy was near. The book was to be fulfilled in their own time and generation.

There are seven such blessings or “Beatitudes” pronounced upon the faithful in the Revelation. The other six are in 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.

SALUTATION AND ADDRESS (1:4-6)

Verse 4 – John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits that are before his throne; Verse 5a – and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

John wrote to the seven churches of Asia (1:11). There were other churches in the area, and the expression “seven,” signifying “completeness,” would include all the churches. The lessons learned apply to us today, in the same way the personal letters of Paul to Corinth or Thessalonica also apply to all Christians in all ages. Only the historical details would not apply.

The salutation is from the Father (“him who is . . .”), the Holy Spirit (“the seven Spirits”), and the Son, Jesus Christ.

Verse 5b – Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; Verse 6 – and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The dedication is to Christ. Note that he loves us, has freed us from sin, and has made us to be a kingdom. He is “King”. Jesus affirms his kingship (John 18:36). Paul states that Christians are in the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13), and that Christ must reign until he comes again at the resurrection (I Corinthians 15:24-26). John says that Christ has made us to be a kingdom and that he, John, shares this kingdom with other Christians (1:6, 9). The kingdom of God is not for the future. It was established in the first century (Hebrews 12:28) and continues even now. God’s children are citizens of this kingdom.

We are priests in that we offer spiritual sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1; Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:15-16). Peter says we are a “royal priesthood” (I Peter 2:9) and that we “offer spiritual sacrifices” through Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:5).

INTRODUCTORY VISION (1:7-20)

Verse 7 — Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they that pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen.

This “coming” no doubt indicates the second coming, that mentioned by the angels in Acts 1:9-11. No event is more adequately documented in Scripture than is the coming of the Son of Man to judge sinners and receive his church. “And if I go and prepare a place for you,” Jesus said, “I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). God has “appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31) and that day of judgment can be no other than that predicted by the Lord himself (John 5:27-29), at the last day (John 6:39-40). This coming is taught by Paul in I Corinthians 15:23-26 and is placed by the apostle at the moment of the resurrection of the dead. Paul further teaches that the “eternal destruction” of the wicked and the glorification of the saints will take place at the Lord’s coming (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

The teaching by some that the “second coming” passages of the New Testament were fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem (A. D. 70) are clearly in error, since there was no resurrection at that time, neither was it the “last day” (John 6:39-40). Paul was certainly not speaking in II Thessalonians of the destruction of Jerusalem. Not only so, but if we are correct in our contention that the Revelation was written after Jerusalem’s fall in A. D. 70 John’s statement, “Behold he cometh with the clouds”

(Revelation 1:7) and the Lord's words, "Yea: I come quickly" (Revelation 22:20), cannot apply to that event but must apply to another future coming.

Verse 8 – I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

"Alpha and Omega" are the first and final letters of the Greek alphabet. God is therefore the Eternal One, the First and the Last. It is not possible to distinguish between the Father and the Son in the Revelation, for both are called by these same terms (See Revelation 1:17; 22:6-7, 13-16).

Verse 9 – I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

The island of Patmos "is in the Aegean Sea, about 60 miles southwest of Ephesus, about 150 miles east of Athens. It is 10 miles long, 6 miles wide; treeless and rocky." (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 630.) Apparently John had been banished there by one of the Roman emperors.

Verse 10 – I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet

John's faculties were taken over in some way by the Holy Spirit on the Lord's Day. Since the expression "The Lord's Day" has been used in almost every century to mean Sunday, the first day of the week (cf. Clement of Alexandria,

Book 7, Chapter 12, c. A. D. 194), we have generally understood John's reference to "the Lord's Day" in the same way. The Greek word *kuriakos* means "belonging to the Lord, the Lord's," and occurs in the New Testament with reference to "the Lord's Supper" (I Corinthians 11:20) and "the Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10). Arndt and Gingrich affirm that the expression as used in Revelation 1:10 is "certainly Sunday." (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1979).

Verse 11 — saying, What thou seest, write in a book and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

These seven churches were located on the main trade routes through Asia Minor. Ephesus was the port city, the first to be reached from Patmos. The letter was carried due north to Smyrna, then on to Pergamum about 100 miles north of Ephesus. Its bearer then went toward the south-east, through Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia till he came to Laodicea, about 100 miles due east of Ephesus.

Verse 12 — And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden candlesticks; Verse 13 — and in the midst of the candlesticks one like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. Verse 14 — And his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; Verse 15 — and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of many waters. Verse 16 — And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

The one who spoke to John was in the midst of seven golden candlesticks (the seven churches, see 1:20). Jesus promised to remain with his disciples till the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). He is even now in our midst.

The long robe and golden girdle distinguish this one as being High Priest, for the High Priest wore the ephod and breast piece of gold (Exodus 28:2-14). Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14).

The white hair and fire recall the vision Daniel saw of God on his throne (Daniel 7:9). The white hair bespeaks the great wisdom of Christ and the flaming eyes symbolize his knowledge of even our most hidden thoughts and deeds. "The Lord looks on the heart" (I Samuel 16:7).

The "burnished bronze" feet perhaps represent the purity of his life, having never "turned aside" to walk in the ways of the ungodly (Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 1:15, 16).

His voice, like rushing waters, was powerful. Even on earth no man ever spoke as he spoke (John 7:46).

He holds the stars in his right hand, the hand of strength and authority (See notes on verse 20).

The sharp sword is the word of God with which Christ will conquer (19:11-16; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17).

His face was like the sun at noon, impossible to look upon. This brilliance signifies his glory, "the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6).

Verse 17 — And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last,

"The first and the last" seems to indicate the same thing as the "Alpha and the Omega" (1:8) and means "eternal".

Verse 18 — *and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.*

He is the “living one,” not simply because he is alive, but because he is self-existent. “I am . . . the life” (John 14:6). Having died and been raised, Jesus has conquered Death and the grave. Thus he has the “keys” of Death and Hades, having power or authority over them (cf. Hebrews 2:14, 15).

Verse 19 — *Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter*

John is one of the instruments God used in revealing to men his urgent message. While such men were indeed “earthen vessels” into which God deposited the priceless treasure of his word (II Corinthians 4:7), God did not entrust the message to the oral voice as a permanent vehicle. The apostles were told to “write” the word, thus ensuring the highest degree possible of inerrancy and permanency. It was through “the commandment of the eternal God” that the mystery was revealed “by the scriptures” (Romans 16:26). Paul says that when we “read” the scriptures we can gain understanding in the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:3-4).

That John is told to write “the things which are” as well as those “which shall come to pass thereafter” supports our contention, as explained in the Introduction, that the apocalyptic style describes past and present circumstances as well as serving as a vehicle for predictive prophecy.

Verse 20 — *the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches:*

and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.

The seven stars represent the seven angels or messengers of the seven churches. They are perhaps those men to whom God has entrusted his word. John the Baptist was such a "messenger" (Mark 1:2). Some of the reproaches addressed to the seven churches appear to be addressed in particular to those who are charged with the oversight of congregations, but the letters were without doubt meant for the whole congregation. These men are pictured as being held in Christ's right hand, his hand of strength.

The candlesticks represent the churches. Note that a candlestick is not the light itself, but that which bears or carries the light. Spiritual light comes from God, but the churches are responsible for holding it forth. If we allow the light to be extinguished our candlestick will be removed (2:5).

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 2

[2:1-3]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Analyze each of the letters in this chapter. Note that each letter commends the church, if possible, warns against the dangers facing each one, and urges them to repent if repentance is needed.

2. Note the similarities between the Nicolaitans, the Balaamites, and the followers of Jezebel.

3. Pay attention to the promises which are given to each church.

I. LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES (Chapters 2-3)

A. LETTER TO EPHEBUS (2:1-7)

Verse 1 — To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks:

Jesus introduces himself to the church in Ephesus as the sustainer of the leaders of that church. He is aware of what is happening in the churches, for he is in their midst.

Verse 2 — I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; Verse 3 — and thou hast patience and didst

bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary.

Jesus commends the Ephesian church for the good that is yet there. Doctrinally this church is sound. It is also a working church which has not allowed false teachers to flourish. They have not grown weary.

Verse 4 – But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love.

The love, however, that these Christians had at the beginning has grown cold (cf. Ephesians 1:15). Like the doctor who continues his practice because that's his job, or the married couple who no longer feel the deep tenderness one for the other, the Ephesians were plodding on, faithfully discharging their duties, abiding by the apostles' teachings, but the love was no longer there.

Verse 5 – Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.

The *exhortation* is to remember, to repent and to do the "first works." Note that these brethren were still working, but good works without love as a basis are of no avail (Galatians 5:6). The *warning* is that Christ would extinguish the light in Ephesus. The group might carry on just as before, using the same church property, wearing the same name of Christ, but except they repent they would no longer be truly a church of Christ. The candlestick would be removed by Christ. Could it be that many churches of today, like Samson, are not aware that the Lord has left them? (Cf. Judges 16:20).

Verse 6 — *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

Some think the Nicolaitans were a sect begun by Nicolas the proselyte (Acts 6:5), based on Ireneus' contention (*Against Heresies*, Book I, Chapter 26:3), but evidence is not sufficient to maintain this view. The name *Nicolas* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name *Balaam* and it is probable the "Nicolaitans" of Ephesus were the same as those of Pergamum who held "the teaching of Balaam" (2:14, 15). These men were teaching that "liberty" in Christ permits a person to do what he wants with his body. Thus immorality is permitted, according to them. They were also encouraging Christians to go ahead and eat food which had been sacrificed to idols (2:14). Paul discourages the eating of such food (I Corinthians 8), because many early Christians with pagan ancestry still regarded the idols as being "gods" with a certain power.

The Nicolaitans were probably "dualists," teaching that flesh is by nature evil, of the Devil, while "spirit" is of God. For them, a person could do what he willed in the flesh, so long as he served God in his spirit. Likewise, they held that the God of the Old Testament was an inferior, malevolent god, while Jesus represented the true, spiritual God. Probably John had these very people in mind, or at least a sect similar to them, when he warned against those false teachers who taught that Jesus had not come in the flesh (I John 4:1-3). According to this dualistic Gnostic heresy, since the flesh is sinful Jesus could not really have appeared in the flesh. He only seemed to be in the flesh, according to them. This heresy presented a very real danger to the churches of the first and second centuries, since it made use of a number of passages from Paul's writings where he contrasts flesh and spirit (cf. Galatians 5:16-22).

Remember that Ephesus was also the home of the goddess of fertility, Artemis (Diana), and immorality was one of the marks of worship offered to her.

Verse 7 – He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Those who overcome are permitted access to the tree of life in God's paradise. This tree represents eternal life.

B. LETTER TO SMYRNA (2:8-11)

Verse 8 – And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again:

Jesus presents himself to the church at Smyrna as the one who died and came to life, a reassuring message to this group of faithful Christians who would soon suffer "unto death." The name "Smyrna" means "myrrh," a costly perfume then used as an antiseptic in embalming (John 19:39). Here the name is symbolic of healing even in death.

Verse 9 – I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

These Christians were poor in worldly goods but rich in faith. Remember them as the "poor rich church." Certain ones who called themselves Jews, but who proved by their

hateful works that they were actually a synagogue of Satan, were opposing the Christians of Smyrna.

Verse 10 — Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.

Some of these Christians were going to be cast into prison. Some would suffer death. For ten days the persecution would rage. This time period is symbolic, possibly denoting a relatively short period of time. Some think it means the period of the reign of the ten persecuting “kings” (17:12). Others think it means ten years, taking a day to be symbolic of a year. Any of these may be true, but we cannot be sure. The Christians are called upon to remain faithful even though they may be killed for it.

Verse 11 — He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

He who remains faithful in spite of the persecution will not be hurt by the second death, the spiritual death, eternal separation from God. “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

C. LETTER TO PERGAMUM (2:12-17)

Verse 12 — And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword:

Pergamum was a magnificent city, famous for its pagan temples and as a royal residence of the emperor. The word "parchment" (a common writing material of the period) derives from "Pergamum." Possibly in an allusion to the renowned library which had been located in Pergamum, Jesus introduces himself as "he who has the sharp two-edged sword." This "sword" is the word of God, God's library, God's compendium of spiritual knowledge. With this "sword" Christ would make war on the Nicolaitans (verse 16).

Verse 13 — I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Many pagan temples were found in the city, as well as a temple dedicated to emperor worship. In spite of such an idolatrous influence, the church had not denied the name of Christ. Even when Antipas was killed in their midst, they remained faithful. It is noteworthy that mention is made of no other martyr in Asia until that time. Persecution in that part of the empire had not yet started, except in isolated incidents. The floodgates were about to be opened.

Verse 14 — But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. Verse 15 — So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.

The Pergamum church, however, had failed to keep the false teachers out. They appear to have tolerated them. Balaam had, through his advice to Balak, caused God's people to stumble into sin in Moses' day (Numbers 24:25 - 25:5; 31:8-16). There were teachers at Pergamum who were doing as Balaam did. These are perhaps the same ones who are called Nicolaitans (See notes on 2:6).

Verse 16 — Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Jesus threatens war on those who do not repent. The weapon he intends to use is his word, the "sword of his mouth." It is God's word which is his power to save (Romans 1:16) and his correcting mirror (James 1:22-25).

Verse 17 — He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

Jesus promises to him who conquers, the following blessings: (1) hidden manna, spiritual sustenance, food which worldly men cannot comprehend; (2) a white stone, evidence of God's approval, which in ancient times represented the vote of approval; (3) a new name, written on the stone, unknown to all except to him who receives it. I think the emphasis should be placed on the expression "except him who receives it." That is, he is the only one who "knows" (understands, appreciates) this "new name" which God is pleased to grant him. Not that there is actually a literal name, but that the relationship which the

“conquering Christian” sustains to God is one which the worldly man cannot comprehend.

D. LETTER TO THYATIRA (2:18-29)

Verse 18 — *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass:*

Thyatira was known chiefly for the manufacture of “purple,” or garments made from cloth which had been colored in purple dye. This fabric was very costly. Lydia, the first convert in Philippi, was from Thyatira and gained her livelihood through the sale of “purple” (Acts 16:14).

Jesus presents himself to these Christians as the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished brass. He has looked into the very heart of the church there and knows the corruption that was threatening its spiritual life. The reference to his feet is perhaps a reference to his own purity of life. Christians are to be like him.

Verse 19 — *I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first.*

The works of this church were more numerous than at the beginning. However, “many mighty works” done in Christ’s name will not avail if people do not obey the will of God (Matthew 7:22).

Verse 20 — *But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit*

fornication; and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

Some think there was at Thyatira a literal woman named Jezebel, who was claiming to be a prophetess. While this may be true, I feel this is simply the symbol of a sect within the church there, teaching much the same immoral doctrine as did the Nicolaitans at Pergamum (2:14, 15). Jezebel, Ahab's queen, was the wickedest of women (I Kings 16:31; 21:25; II Kings 9:22, 30). She brought idolatry into Israel on a scale never before seen. Her harlotries were many. What better symbol of an immoral teacher could John have used?

Verse 21 — And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication.

In the Old Testament, Jezebel had ample time to turn from her sin, but she would not. God is patient with men, not wishing that any should perish (II Peter 3:9).

Verse 22 — Behold, I cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works.

This is an evident reference to the disease which accompanies the promiscuous and immoral use of the body. In a spiritual sense those who follow the corrupt teachings of this ungodly sect will fall heir to its corruption (Galatians 6:7, 8). In the Old Testament, Jezebel was thrown down from the top of the city wall (II Kings 9:30-35), and here she is pictured as being cast onto a sickbed, a bed of suffering and death.

Verse 23 — And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth

the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works.

Jezebel's spiritual "children" would die with her at Thyatira, just as her natural children were slain by the sword of Jehu (II Kings 9:22ff; 10:11).

Such a judgment on the evildoers at Thyatira would strike fear into the heart of all the churches, and they would recognize that God does look into the heart and judge men according to their deeds.

Verse 24 — But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who know not the deep things of Satan, as they are wont to say; I cast upon you none other burden.

Some of the Christians at Thyatira did not follow the teachings of this pernicious sect in their midst, but the majority apparently went along. God promised not to lay any additional burden upon them as their present burden was already heavy enough.

These faithful Christians had not "learned" the so-called "deep things" of Satan. Those who hold to "liberal" permissive theories of morality cannot understand why the pure and holy cannot grasp or comprehend the fine distinctions they make between what is permitted and not permitted in Christian conduct. So they look down on them in scorn, deriding them as being naive and somewhat simple. The uncorrupted at Thyatira were indeed so closely following the pure footprints of the burnished bronze feet of Jesus that they were incapable of "learning" such "deep" philosophy.

Verse 25 — Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come.

These holy Christians were encouraged to “hold fast” what they had “until I come.” This is not an allusion to the second advent of Jesus, but rather a reference to his coming to punish Jezebel and her followers (2:22). Jesus did not deceive these Christians into believing that he would come in their lifetime.

Verse 26 — And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: Verse 27 — and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father:

“Power over the nations” is promised to those who conquer. This power is not to be considered literally any more than “authority over ten cities” (Luke 19:17) is to be taken as literal. These are figures emphasizing the great blessings which God will grant to the faithful.

The expression “he shall *rule* them” literally means “he shall *shepherd* them” and is so translated in Revelation 7:17. It is obvious that the “power” which the conquering Christian would receive “over the nations” would be a power jointly exercised with Christ (2:27). This power would be at the same time *gentle* and *harsh*. To those who obey him Jesus is like a shepherd, gently guiding his sheep with his staff. To the “nations” who would attack and destroy his sheep Jesus would be as a shepherd, protecting his sheep with his rod, utterly breaking in pieces the attackers. This “iron rod rule” is not symbolic of rule over the nations during a thousand years, but rather of the utter destruction awaiting the wolf which attacks the sheepfold.

The apostles had received such a promise when, at the institution of the Lord’s supper, Jesus said: “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, even as my Father appointed

unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and ye shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29, 30). The apostles judged and are still judging men through their preaching of the gospel. There is also the further sense in which Christians “judge” the nations through their righteous lives (Cf. Luke 11:30-32).

Verse 28 – and I will give him the morning star.

The morning star is promised to him who overcomes. The morning star is a symbol of new hope after the darkness of despair, the harbinger of day. Jesus is himself called “the bright morning star” (22:16).

Verse 29 – He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

What Jesus says to Thyatira he says to all the churches in all times. Let us hear this word of the Spirit.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 3

[3:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Analyze each letter as you did in Chapter 2.
2. Go back now and review the seven churches. Make a chart of these churches, showing which ones are bad or good.

E. LETTER TO SARDIS (3:1-6)

Verse 1 – And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.

Sardis was situated on Mount Tmolus, about thirty-five miles south of Thyatira, and in former times had been a strongly fortified city. When in 546 B. C. King Cyrus of Persia besieged Sardis, the citizens looked down in smug security on his multitude of soldiers. They could not be taken by this foreign army! But Cyrus watched the city from all sides and one day spied a man coming down the steep rocky cliff by a secret passage. He then led his army up the path one by one and took the city by surprise, for the walls were virtually unguarded. The city fell because of lethargy and over-confidence. They were not watchful. This is the message Jesus speaks to the Christians at Sardis.

Jesus has the “seven spirits of God,” the Holy Spirit, without measure (John 3:34), and he has the “seven stars,” God’s ministers in the church. He is thus able to convict the church of sin, bring a church back from the dead. The church at Sardis had the reputation of being a living, zealous church, but it was dead. One’s reputation does not always speak the truth about what he really is at heart.

Verse 2 — Be thou watchful, and establish the things that remain, which were ready to die: for I have found no works of thine perfected before my God.

There were still some who had not “soiled their garments” (3:4), but they needed to strengthen themselves. Because of them and their faithfulness the church was not yet completely dead, but it was on the verge of dying.

Verse 3 — Remember therefore how thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

The exhortation to them was first to remember, then to repent. This church was asleep, so they were to awaken and watch. This is the key word in this letter. Be vigilant, or the Lord will come just as Cyrus had come to the ancient city, like a thief in the night. Again, this coming is not the second coming of Christ, but a spiritual coming, specifically to the church at Sardis. If they repented he would not come in that manner.

Verse 4 — But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy.

Among all the Christians at Sardis, only a few still had not soiled their garments, dirtied and ruined the white robes of righteousness which Christ had given them at their conversion. They receive the promise that they will one day walk with Christ in white, for they are worthy.

Verse 5 — He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

The promise to him who overcomes is threefold: (1) He will be clothed in white garments, symbolic of purity. (2) Christ will not blot his name out of the book of life. (3) Christ will confess his name before the Father and his angels. Note that although a Christian's name is written in the book of life he can so live as to have it blotted out of this book.

F. LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA (3:7-13)

Verse 6 — He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Verse 7 — And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth and none openeth: Verse 8 — I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name.

Philadelphia, about twenty-five miles southeast of Sardis, was, according to its name, the city of "brotherly love." The church there was worthy of that name, and the

Lord says nothing against her, only good, and thus she joins the church at Smyrna as one of the two "good" churches of the Revelation.

Jesus presents himself to this church as the "holy one, the true," perhaps because these Christians had kept themselves holy and true to him. It is Christ also who has the "key of David." It is he who opens and shuts. The "key of David" probably represents the authority of David, or in this instance the authority of Christ who is seated on the throne of David. A key is symbolic of power or authority and in ancient times was perhaps worn upon the shoulder of the office-holder to identify him. The reference to the key of David is based upon Isaiah 22:20-22, where the prophet foretold the coming attack on the city of Jerusalem by the Assyrian armies (II Kings 18, 19). Because this attack would take place very soon, within months, the prophet Isaiah was anxious that King Hezekiah place his trust in Jehovah for deliverance. Shebna, the steward, had recommended that Hezekiah appeal to Egypt for military assistance, and because of this bad advice he would be replaced by Eliakim. Eliakim would "be a father" to the people (Isaiah 22:21) and direct them to God who would deliver the city. In Isaiah 22:22 it is Eliakim who would "open, and none shall shut." This probably means that through Eliakim's advice and counsel a door of security and safety would be opened to the city. This is indeed what happened, for the people took refuge in God. In the Revelation (3: 7, 8) it is Jesus who stands in the place of steward over God's house, with the symbolic key of David to identify him, counseling the people to place their trust in God who would save them in the hour of trial. Jesus opens to this church a door of refuge which no man can shut.

The church at Philadelphia had but little power. It may have been small in number, yet these Christians had

not denied Christ. They would soon have the opportunity to again witness to their faith in Christ. They are encouraged to continue trusting in God for their strength.

Verse 9 — Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

As at Smyrna (2:9), the Jews at Philadelphia were participating in the harassment of the church. They would soon learn that God was with the church, for the impending persecutions would be directed specifically toward the Jews. It is perhaps for this reason that the Philadelphian church would be spared the “hour of trial” (3:10).

Verse 10 — Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

The church had heeded Christ’s counsel to endure patiently and was now going to be rewarded. He would protect them from “the about to come hour of trial,” as the Greek text is literally translated. It seems that this hour was almost upon them, not something far removed. Indeed, the Jewish population of Asia would suffer along with the Judean Jews during and following the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. The expression “the whole world” probably indicates the entire Roman empire, for the Greek word *oikoumene* was commonly used in the exclusive sense of the Roman dominions (cf. Luke 2:1).

Verse 11 — I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.

The Greek word *tachus* may be correctly translated either as an adverb indicating the rapid rate of his coming, "without delay," or "soon," depending upon the context. (Arndt and Gingrich, 1979, under *tachus*.) It is not clear in this verse just how we should understand the word. It is clear, however, that a great sense of urgency attaches to this word. The church is exhorted to "hold fast" what they have so that no one can seize their crown. As in a race, one may appear to be winning, but if he slows down or "loses heart" (Galatians 6:9) he may fail to win, and thus another may "seize" the crown that should be his.

Verse 12 — He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name. Verse 13 — He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

The promises to him who overcomes: (1) He will be made an immovable pillar in the house of God, unshakable, so long as the church stands. (2) He will never have to flee or be afraid, but will dwell in security, a reference perhaps to the people fleeing the city because of the frequent earthquakes. (3) The name of God will be written on him, possibly a reference to God's "seal" of approval with which he marks the forehead of his people (7:2, 3). (4) He will wear the name of God's city, the new Jerusalem, as well as Christ's new name. Perhaps this means that it will be clear to all that the conquering Christian is truly a child of God. No one can possibly think he is counterfeit or fake.

G. LETTER TO LAODICEA (3:14-22)

Verse 14 — *And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:*

Laodicea lay some fifty miles southeast of Philadelphia, and was a magnificent, wealthy city. The population regarded the city as being self-sufficient by virtue of her various industries. The preparation of woolen materials was one of the chief industries, and black wool seems to have been a specialty. The city also was recognized for the production of salve for weak eyes.

Jesus presents himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness.” He not only speaks truth but he is “the Truth” (John 14:6), and thus stands in contrast to the false and deceitful values by which the Laodicean Christians were measuring themselves. Jesus is also “the beginning of God’s creation” (vs. 14), not in the sense of being the first thing created, but in the sense of being himself the Beginner, the Origin, the Source of God’s creation. Some use this verse in an attempt to prove that Jesus is a created being. They overlook the fact, however, that the original word *archē* (“beginning”) has a number of different uses and translations, and it can be used in an active sense. *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* defines the word actively: “That by which anything begins to be, the origin; active cause.” This corresponds with John 1:2, 3 where we read: “The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.”

Verse 15 — *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. Verse 16* — *So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth.*

Just as Jesus cannot bear hypocrisy, he will not tolerate lukewarmness. Neither does he wish us to be cold as an alternative to being lukewarm! It is true, however, that a man of convictions, whatever they may be, is preferable to him who really has none. The lukewarm Christian will be vomited out of Christ's mouth.

Verse 17 — Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked:

The great wealth of Laodicea caused the church to believe itself in need of nothing beyond its own capabilities to provide. They thought all was well with them, but they were in deep trouble, wretched. They believed themselves to be on top of the heap, but they were to be *pitied*. They were financially very rich, but they were *poor* spiritually. In spite of the manufacture of eye salve at Laodicea, these Christians were *blind* spiritually. Though Laodicea was a great textile center these people were *naked*. Yet they were unaware of their true condition.

Verse 18 — I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest; and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.

Jesus counsels them to trade their gold for his "gold" which has been put to the test, tried by fire. Theirs will profit them nothing if they lose their souls. He calls on them to buy his "white garments" so their nakedness will not appear. This is an allusion to their own black woolen

cloth of which they were so proud. White garments represent the righteousness of the saints (19:8). They are to take his spiritual salve to anoint their eyes so that they may see again.

Verse 19 — As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Lest they feel unjustly treated, Jesus reminds them that only children who are loved are chastened and reprov'd. Christ wants us to be zealous in our repentance.

Verse 20 — Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To the Laodicean church a special invitation is given, to allow Christ to come in and sup with them. They had so effectively kept him out of their lives. In their smug self-righteousness they had eliminated the need for him and his righteousness. Yet he stands patiently at their door and knocks, wanting very much to come in and sit with them at their table, to be allowed to share with them that which only he can share. Sometimes we all become so engrossed in our own activities and capabilities that we do not hear the knocking at the door. And as our lives become more and more full of ourselves, the din and noise on the inside eventually drowns out the knocking at the door. At first we will not hear, till at last we cannot hear. How long will he patiently knock?

Verse 21 — He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. Verse 22 — He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

The promise to him who conquers is to be allowed to sit with Christ on his throne. This is symbolic of victory, which we share jointly with Christ. We are "joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (Romans 8:17). Notice that the throne on which Christ is sitting is the Father's throne. Some think that Christ's throne (the one promised to Christians) is different from the Father's throne. They say that Jesus will one day sit on the "throne of David" (Isaiah 9:6, 7). But a distinction between David's throne and God's throne cannot be upheld, for the Scripture says they are the same. David's throne *was* God's throne. "So Solomon sat upon the throne of David his father" (I Kings 2:12). "Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord (Jehovah) as king instead of David his father" (I Chronicles 29:23). When Jesus came forth victorious over the grave he began to reign on the "throne of David," according to Peter (Acts 2:30, 31). He reigns now and continues to reign until he returns to resurrect the dead, at which time he will deliver the kingdom to the Father (I Corinthians 15:24-26). During the present age, Christians who overcome participate in a symbolic way with Christ in his reign.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 4

[4:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Since idolatry, in the form of emperor-worship, was going to be forced upon Christians in the coming years, John, at the very first, presents God on his throne. Draw a diagram of the scene, labeling the position of all persons or creatures mentioned.

2. Read Ezekiel 1:4-28 and Isaiah 6:1-3 and compare the living creatures of the Revelation with those of the prophets.

II. GOD ON THE THRONE (Chapters 4 - 5)

A. GOD IS WORSHIPPED (Chapter 4)

Verse 1 — After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice that I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter.

Having received the messages recorded in the first three chapters, John saw in heaven an “open door,” through which he was to “see” many things. This open door symbolizes the revealing of things which would happen later. The voice “like a trumpet” belonged to Christ, whom John had seen in Chapter One (1:10, 18). John was told to

“come up hither,” recalling the experience of Paul when he was caught up into Paradise (II Corinthians 12:1-4).

Verse 2 — Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne;

Immediately John was “in the Spirit.” The apostle may have been in some kind of trance, but it does not appear that he lost control of his faculties. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit he was able to see many things and to remember them.

John saw the throne of God and God seated on his throne. No doubt he saw a representation of God, for the Bible states that no man can see God and live (Exodus 33:20; I Timothy 6:16).

Verse 3 — and he that sat was to look upon like a jasper stone and a sardius: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look upon.

God’s appearance was as a jasper stone, probably dark green, and as sardius, or carnelian, a reddish variety of chalcedony quartz, beautiful beyond verbal description. Around the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald. The rainbow seems to symbolize the eternal faithfulness of God.

Verse 4 — And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their heads crowns of gold.

The twenty-four elders probably represent the twelve patriarchs of Israel together with the twelve apostles,

representative of God's people through the ages. They are pictured as sitting on thrones in a circle around God's throne. They are clad in righteousness, with golden crowns of victory on their heads.

Verse 5 — And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;

The lightning, voices and thunder recall the scene at Mount Sinai when Moses went up to meet Jehovah (Exodus 19:16-20). Also present before the throne of God are seven burning torches, which seem to represent the Holy Spirit of God (See 1:4, 5).

Verse 6 — and before the throne, as it were a sea of glass like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living creatures full of eyes before and behind.

The sea of glass has been interpreted in various ways, but does not seem to be of any special significance, except to complete the scenario.

At the center of the circle, near the throne of God, are four living creatures. The word "beast" (King James Version) is an incorrect translation of the Greek *ZOA*, and is rather drawn from the description which follows in verse seven. These "living creatures" must not be confused with the "beasts" later to appear in the book. The fact that these "living creatures" are full of eyes "before and behind" seems to indicate their restless activity.

Verse 7 — And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had

a face as of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.

The four creatures each present a different aspect of God's animal creation: the lion (wild animals), the calf (domesticated animals), mankind, and the birds. In Chapter Six these four living creatures appear almost as narrators in a drama, announcing the opening of the first four "seals." With the opening of each seal there comes in succession bloodshed, famine, death, and pestilence, affecting all living creatures.

Verse 8 – And the four living creatures, having each one of them six wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.

Each of the seraphim which stood above Jehovah's throne in Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6:1-4) had six wings: "With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew." The seraphim also called out, "Holy, holy, holy," etc. This is symbolic of never ceasing praise, of which God alone is worthy. In a real sense God's living creation on earth is continually singing praises to Him (cf. Psalm 19:1-4).

Verse 9 – And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to him that liveth for ever and ever, Verse 10 – the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Verse 11 – Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God,

to receive the glory and the honor and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created.

Simultaneously, the twenty-four elders fall down before God and worship, casting their crowns down before the throne in humble adoration. Their song “Worthy art thou!” should ever be on the lips of God’s children.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 5

[5:1-5]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Locate the Lamb in his place in the scene of Chapter 4 and consider the various qualities attributed to him in Chapter 5.

2. Study the various details of Chapter 5 which suggest priestly functions or activities, for example, the Lamb, golden bowls of incense, redemption, God's throne (i.e. Mercy seat, cf. Hebrews 4:16).

3. Remember that Christ is presented in the opening vision of Chapter One clothed in priestly robes. Here he is pictured as the sacrifice. Read Hebrews 8:3; 9:14; and 10:4-14 where Jesus is shown to be both priest and offering.

B. THE LAMB IS WORSHIPPED (Chapter 5)

Verse 1 — And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals. Verse 2 — And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? Verse 3 — And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon. Verse 4 — And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: Verse 5 — and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof.

The Father holds a scroll, sealed with seven seals. The opening of each seal will make known part of the contents of this scroll. Each successive seal will reveal to John something which will shortly come to pass (1:1).

One of God's angels issues a call for someone to come and open the seals. This one must be "worthy," but alas, no one is able to open the book. Seeing this, John is so sad that he weeps. But one of the elders reassures John that there is one who is worthy to break the seals. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome and is able to open this scroll.

In his final hours Jacob prophesied that his son Judah would be strong like a lion. He said that Judah would hold the scepter among his brothers and that "the ruler's staff" would not depart from Judah until "Shiloh" came (Genesis 49:9-10). This is an evident reference to Jesus who would come as the Prince of Peace (Shiloh means "peace"), to exercise the government (Isaiah 9:6-7). Micah prophesied that the coming "ruler" would be born in the Judean hamlet of Bethlehem, and that as a result of his peaceful rule the remnant of Jacob would be strong, "like a young lion" (Micah 5:2, 8).

In like manner the presence of Jesus lends strength to his disciples in their dark hours. Thus, Jesus is pictured as a lion. He has conquered and his disciples have nothing more to fear.

Jesus is also "the Root of David." This is an allusion to Isaiah 11:1, 10 and identifies Jesus as the one of whom the prophet spoke. Paul confirms this in Romans 15:12. Isaiah's prophecy was therefore fulfilled in the first appearance of Christ. The Root of Jesse and of David stands today "as an ensign to the peoples" and the Gentiles trust in him.

Verse 6 — And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a

Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth. Verse 7 — And he came, and he taketh it out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne. Verse 8 — And when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

When John turns to look at the Lion of Judah he sees a Lamb, standing with bloodstained fleece. What a marvelous paradox! A Lamb which has conquered like a lion! This explains why so many were reluctant to follow Christ during his personal ministry. He was so meek and gentle and those who relied upon the power of the sword gave him no more than a passing glance before they rejected him as being ineffectual. While he hung on the cross his enemies taunted him: "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (Matthew 27:42). How little did they know the true strength which resided in this seemingly powerless Lamb which they were sacrificing. Three days later he triumphed over the grave, later to ascend to heaven where he stands in the midst of the throne of God.

The Lamb has seven horns, signifying all authority (Matthew 28:18); seven eyes, signifying that the Holy Spirit of God was with him, carrying out his work on the earth. Jesus had told the disciples: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you . . . He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16:7-14).

When the Lamb takes the sealed scroll from the right hand of the Father, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down and worship him. The harps and the golden bowls full of incense symbolize their praise. The

incense represents prayer as it ascends before the throne of God, and the harps represent songs of praise. Neither the bowls nor the harps are to be taken literally.

Verse 9 — And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, Verse 10 — and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth. Verse 11 — And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Verse 12 — saying with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing. Verse 13 — And every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying, Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever. Verse 14 — And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and worshipped.

“Worthy art thou!” is the new song which the elders and the living creatures sing to Jesus. They are soon joined by the united voice of innumerable angels in a swelling hymn of praise: “Worthy of power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” The mighty chorus is further strengthened by the added voices of all the rest of God’s creatures, on the earth and in the sea, as the whole universe suddenly breaks into song. When the doxology is finished, the four living creatures say “Amen!” and the elders fall down and worship.

Jesus' prayer is fulfilled: "Father, glorify thou me with thine ownself with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

Verse 10 requires additional comment. What does it mean that God's ransomed children "shall reign upon the earth?" Does it mean they shall become literal kings on the earth? It rather signifies the triumphant life which is theirs through the grace and power of Christ. "Much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17). And it is now that Christians reign. It is now that we are "unto our God a kingdom and priests."

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 6

[6:1-2]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Do a little art work! Prepare a scroll of seven pages, draw a color description of each of the seven sealed visions.

2. Read Matthew 24:4-34 (a description of events preceding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70) and study the sixth seal in this light. Consider also Luke's account of how this would be (Luke 21:6-26).

III. SEVEN SEALS (Chapters 6:1 - 8:1)

A. FIRST SEAL: WHITE HORSE (Chapter 6:1-2)

Verse 1 — And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come. Verse 2 — And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.

Since the first four seals announce harm which will befall the earth, it is fitting that the living creatures, symbolic of God's creatures on earth, announce them.

The first vision is of a white horse with its rider. White symbolizes purity and victory. This rider seems to represent Christ or the emissaries of Christ, setting out to announce

the gospel to all the world. Revelation 19:11-16 presents Christ on a white horse with many diadems on his head and a sword in his hand. The rider in the first seal has a bow instead of a sword, one crown instead of many. Because of these differences some think this rider is not the same as in 19:11. It still seems to me that if it is not Christ it must nevertheless be a symbol of the gospel proclamation.

B. SECOND SEAL: RED HORSE (Chapter 6:3-4)

Verse 3 – And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come. Verse 4 – And another horse came forth, a red horse: and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

The second horse is bright red, the color of warfare, bloodshed and persecution. This naturally follows the preaching of the gospel, for the world cannot long abide the light which reveals and condemns its wickedness (John 15:18-22). The rider of the red horse carries a “great” sword. His work will be accomplished with satanic vengeance.

C. THIRD SEAL: BLACK HORSE (Chapter 6:5-6)

Verse 5 – And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a balance in his hand. Verse 6 – And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a shilling, and three measures of barley for a shilling; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.

Black is the color of famine and want. The balance held by the horseman indicates that the necessities of life would be carefully weighed and doled out in small quantities, scarcely enough to sustain life. These small quantities of wheat and barley would not make much bread but would cost a full day's wages. But while the necessities were to be scarce, the luxuries of life would remain plentiful. The oil and wine would not be harmed. Christians were to undergo many hardships as a result of fierce persecution.

D. FOURTH SEAL: PALE HORSE (Chapter 6:7-8)

Verse 7 – And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. Verse 8 – And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

The pale horse signifies death. Death rides this horse, and following close behind him is the grave, Hades, swallowing up those who are killed by God's "four sore acts of Judgment" (Ezekiel 14:21). Multitudes would die before the wars and persecution ceased.

E. FIFTH SEAL: SAINTS UNDER THE ALTAR (Chapter 6:9-11).

Verse 9 – And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: Verse 10 – and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not

judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? Verse 11 — And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.

John sees a piteous picture of the slain martyrs of this period of persecution. They are “under the altar” and are crying to God for justice. Their cry is reminiscent of David’s cry for help when he was hiding in the cave (Psalm 142; I Samuel 22:1). Psalm 88:1-7 closely resembles their cry of distress as it appears to all that they are conquered and destroyed. Their persecutors laugh and mock, for it seems they have died for no valid reason.

Yet God hears their cries and tells them to have patience. In due time God’s justice will prevail. Meanwhile, more Christians will be killed, until finally the persecution will end. Then God’s faithful witnesses, now “under the altar,” will be on thrones, reigning with Christ. They will overcome even as Christ overcame.

The fifth seal symbolizes the apparent defeat of God’s children and his cause. It appears to the world that their blood has been poured out to no avail upon the sacrificial altar. But through faith and the power of God, those who now seem to be defeated will ultimately be victorious. They will “reign” with Christ for “a thousand years” (20:4). This thousand year reign is symbolic of the complete and utter triumph of God’s children and of his cause. It must not be taken literally of an earthly reign on a material throne in Jerusalem. Those who support such an interpretation make the same mistake that the first century Jews made, supposing that the kingdom of God was “of this world” (John 18:36).

The fifth seal, key to a proper understanding of the so-called "thousand year reign" of Chapter 20, is an obvious reference to the Jewish sacrificial system which pervades the symbolism of the Revelation. In view of the frequency with which we meet such allusions in the Revelation, let us at this point gather these symbolic threads together in order to obtain a more complete picture.

John first introduces his readers to the High Priest of Christianity (Revelation 1:12-20). The Son of God is seen standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands (1:13). These lampstands represent the churches, which altogether compose God's spiritual temple on earth (cf. I Corinthians 3:16, 17). The temple is the proper sphere of activity for the High Priest. It is there that he offered his own blood (Revelation 1:5), and now stands, properly dressed in his priestly robes and golden girdle, ready to present before God's altar the blood of his faithful martyrs (Revelation 6:9). This blood is poured out at the base of the altar (cf. Deuteronomy 12:27).

That Christians are to regard themselves as holy sacrifices to God is obvious when we read such texts as Romans 12:1. Yet the symbolism of sacrifice runs much deeper in the New Testament writings and many times is overlooked by the average student. For example, to the Philippians Paul writes: "even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad" (Philippians 2:17, RSV). He sees their faith as a sacrificial offering and views his possible death at the hands of the Romans as a "drink offering" which would be "poured out" on that sacrifice. Then, to the Colossians Paul rejoices in his sufferings in their behalf. He views his sufferings as in addition to the already full cup of anguish which Christ partook, and this he does willingly, for the church's sake. As he approached death in his Roman cell,

Paul wrote that he was "already on the point of being sacrificed" (II Timothy 4:6, RSV). So in the Revelation Christian martyrs are viewed as sacrificial offerings to God, holy and acceptable.

As the seven angels prepare to sound their trumpets (Chapter 8), an angel takes a golden censer and offers incense upon the golden altar before the Most Holy Place (8:3-4). This is a continuation of the theme of the fifth seal (6:9) and shows that the prayers of God's saints in trouble are indeed presented to God in heaven. When the angel next fills the emptied censer with fire from the altar and throws it on the earth, he is showing that God does indeed answer the prayers of his people. The vision of the open temple in heaven (15:5-8) also shows that the way into the presence of God is open (cf. Hebrews 10:19-22) and that God is constantly looking down upon his people, answering their cries of distress.

When the seven golden bowls of God's wrath are poured out upon the earth, in response to the prayers of the martyrs (cf. 6:9-10; 8:5; 15:7; 16:1-21), the "altar" cries out, "Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments!" (16:7). Obviously, at this point, the martyrs are still "under the altar," but God is on the attack against the persecutors and the martyrs will see that their lives were not given in vain.

The Harlot (old Jerusalem) "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (17:6), is destroyed, as well as the Beast (Rome) who attempts to force God's people to sacrifice to idols. Then the martyrs are "resurrected" and reign with Christ for a "thousand years." All of this is symbolic of the glory which the faithful receive to which their sufferings are not worthy to be compared (Romans 8:18).

F. SIXTH SEAL: GREAT EARTHQUAKE (Chapter 6:12-17).

Verse 12 — And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; Verse 13 — and the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs when she is shaken of a great wind. Verse 14 — And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Verse 15 — And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; Verse 16 — and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: Verse 17 — for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?

In the historical context of the Revelation, one great event of far-reaching significance to Jew and Christian alike should not be overlooked as we explain the sixth seal. A united view of the first six seals shows a progression: the Gospel is preached, persecution follows, Christians suffer want, famine and death. The sixth seal represents a day of wrath which I believe to be the destruction of Jerusalem, climaxing the Jewish rebellion which lasted from the Spring of A.D. 67 to the Autumn of A.D. 70. Remember that apocalyptic symbols could represent past events and the city was, as I believe, already destroyed when the Revelation was written. God is reminding Christians of the city's catastrophic downfall and warning of further persecutions.

The heavenly bodies represent the religious authorities in Judea, as seems probable in Isaiah 13:10; Daniel 8:10 and Matthew 24:27-29. These are cast down forcibly as are figs when the tree is shaken by the stormy winds. This figure is used of the downfall of Nineveh (Nahum 3:12) and of Israel's enemies (Isaiah 34:4).

"Mountains" represent kings and kingdoms which would be overthrown. "Islands" represent tribes and peoples which depend on the great city of Jerusalem for their livelihood. These islands appear to be the merchants who "stand far off" and lament the destruction of the city (16:19-20; 18:11-19).

In the final hours of Jerusalem's agony, her strong men cry out for mercy and deliverance and find none, for the tribulation of those days is greater than at any other time in history (Matthew 24:21). Jesus spoke of this while bearing his cross to Calvary (Luke 23:28-31).

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 7

[7:1-5]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Examine the tribes mentioned and compare the names with the original twelve tribes. How do the lists differ? Why do you think there is a difference?

2. May we think of the 144,000 as referring to the redeemed before the cross and of the great multitude as referring to the redeemed under the Great Commission?

3. Read Psalms 23 and 121 and compare them with Revelation 7:16, 17. Note how the language suggests peace and comfort.

G. INTERMISSION OF HOPE (Chapter 7:1-17)

1. 144,000 SEALED (Chapter 7:1-8)

Verse 1 – After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree. Verse 2 – And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Verse 3 – saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. Verse 4 – And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel: Verse 5 – Of the

tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; Verse 6 – Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand; Verse 7 – Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand; Verse 8 – Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

Chapter seven is a dramatic break in the series of symbols of destruction and tribulation. It is intended to comfort God's elect, to show them that in the midst of trouble he is with them. They will overcome through Christ.

Four angels hold back the four winds (cf. 6:8) to prevent them from hurting the earth, sea and trees. This is a "time-out" signal, providing time for God's messenger to "seal" his people. Following this, the "winds" of persecution and destruction would again blow, as in Revelation 6:13. Jeremiah foretold such a "wind" of judgment against Jerusalem, signifying the coming of the armies of Babylon (Jeremiah 4:11ff).

The "seal" placed on God's servants is simply God's approval of them. Their lives are a witness to their faith and God recognizes them as his own (II Timothy 2:19).

It seems that these are either Jews who were saved by faith under Judaism or they are Jewish Christians. The number 144,000 is the product of twelve times twelve thousand. These numbers are symbolic. Twelve is the number of God's people, as illustrated in the twelve tribes of Israel. A thousand seems to indicate the perfect happiness or victory (cf. Notes on 20:1-3) which God grants to his faithful people. So in each of twelve tribes there are

twelve thousand redeemed to indicate the complete number of God's elect.

It will be noted that the tribe of Dan is not mentioned in this list, probably because Dan early went into idolatry (Judges 18). Ephraim is also passed over in this list, since this tribe was the seat of government of the idolatrous northern Kingdom of Israel. Samaria was its capital. The Book of Revelation is basically a warning to God's people against the idolatrous emperor worship which would soon be forced upon the world.

Some sects teach that the 144,000 are an elect group which shall inherit heaven while all the other children of God will remain on a renovated earth. Note that the context of chapter seven does not teach such. A strictly literalistic view of the text will show the 144,000 to be *on the earth* (vs. 3), while the "great multitude" (the "other" believers) are pictured *in heaven*, before God's throne (7:9; 4:2). Actually, however, the two multitudes complete each other and should not be taken separately. They are all saved individuals. If the 144,000 are understood as being Jews saved by faith before Christ died, these must surely be glorified along with Christians (Hebrews 11:39-40). Paul affirms that in our own period God makes no difference between Jews and non-Jews, counting us all among "Abraham's offspring" (Galatians 3:28-29).

2. THE GREAT MULTITUDE (Chapter 7:9-17)

Verse 9 – After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; Verse 10 – and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God who

sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. Verse 11 — And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Verse 12 — saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

The great multitude, different from the 144,000, draws from every nation. This is the church, which resulted from the preaching of the great commission (Matthew 28: 18-19). They stand before the throne of God, which is in heaven (4:2). Their robes are white, signifying their cleansing in the blood of the Lamb. Palm branches, representing peace and praise, are in their hands.

With one voice they praise God and the Lamb for their salvation, for they overcome through the strength which God provides in Christ. The angels, the elders and the four living creatures again fall prostrate before the throne and worship.

Verse 13 — And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in white robes, who are they, and whence came they? Verse 14 — And I say unto him, My Lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

This great multitude symbolizes those who had passed through the "great tribulation" and had made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. Following the burning of Rome in A. D. 64, Nero blamed the Christians and caused thousands of them to be slaughtered. It is no wonder that in the Revelation Nero is pictured as a "beast," as we shall see

later. This slaughter of Christians in Italy was, however, only the beginning of even greater tribulation which would last for nearly two centuries. During the Jewish rebellion, which reached its climax in the destruction of Jerusalem, many more of God's children and many Jews were slaughtered. The promise to those who overcame is that "they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy" (3:4).

Verse 15 — Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. Verse 16 — They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: Verse 17 — for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

These verses paint a beautiful picture of the peace and tranquility which victorious Christians would enjoy. They are in God's presence, sheltered and protected. The image is one of a sheepfold, with the Lamb as the Shepherd (John 10:14, 15) providing the sheep (God's children) with all they need, shielding them from the scorching heat, wiping away every tear from their eyes.

This portrayal of ultimate triumph would comfort those who were enduring the terrible flames of persecution. Other passages present this same picture of peace and comfort (Psalms 12, 121; Isaiah 25:8; 49:10; Ezekiel 34: 23-24; Revelation 21:3, 4; 22:1-5). It is a picture of the victory which we experience here on the earth in Christ (Philippians 4:7, 11-13), but it is also a glimpse of eternal happiness which the saints will enjoy around the throne of God.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 8

[8:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Examine verses 8-15 for elements which suggest priestly functions. Keep in mind what you have seen in preceding chapters.

2. Go back and study the fifth seal (Revelation 6:9). Remember that the martyrs were under the altar (just as the blood of sacrifices was poured at the base of the altar, Leviticus 4:7; 5:9; 9:8-9), and they were calling on God for vengeance. Do we see an answer in Chapter 8 to their prayers?

3. Study the plagues which were sent on Egypt before the Exodus and compare the first four trumpets to these plagues.

H. SEVENTH SEAL: SILENCE (Chapter 8:1)

Verse 1 — And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

This seal is opened by the Lamb himself, and immediately there is a half-hour period of silence: no praise, no singing, no noise of battle. The silence is one of suspense, of calm before the storm. One also senses the concern of the Savior for those in suffering, as at the death of Stephen (Acts 7:56).

The seventh seal appears to include the seven trumpets which now begin to be sounded.

IV. SEVEN TRUMPETS (Chapter 8:2 - 11:19)

A. ANGEL WITH GOLDEN CENSER (Chapter 8: 2-5)

Verse 2 – And I saw the seven angels that stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.

Verse 3 – And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Verse 4 – And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

Verse 5 – And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

The seven angels are simply seven messengers of God assigned to “sound” the trumpets: that is, to introduce the succeeding visions or revelations.

Another angel approaches the altar of incense, inside the holy place before the veil, holding a golden censer. The incense represents the saints' prayers as they rise before the throne of God. Remember those who had been killed for their witness to God's word, and who appear “under the altar” (in a position of apparent defeat). They appealed to God to judge their persecutors (6:9-10). In chapter seven we see them in white, standing before the throne of God. In chapter eight we see their prayers going up before God, as a sweet odor of incense. When the prayers are finished the angel fills the censer with fire from the altar, and throws

it on the earth. The thunder, noises, lightning and earthquake represent God's answer to the prayers of the saints. We should remember that none of our earnest prayers remain unanswered. "God is not slack" concerning his promises (II Peter 3:9).

The thunder, noises, etc. appear as judgments on the persecuting powers, in the same way that God judged and brought low the Assyrians even after he had used them to chastise Israel for their sin (Isaiah 10:5-19). The Assyrians were boasting that by their might they had taken Israel (Isaiah 10:12-13), but God said they were just the "axe" in the hand of the "hewer" (Isaiah 10:15). So it was with the Roman persecutors. When they finished with their appointed task they also would be brought low. This is the meaning of Daniel's prophecy (quoted by Christ as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, Matthew 24:15) that the desolator himself would come to nought (Daniel 9:27).

1. FIRST TRUMPET (Chapter 8:7)

Verse 6 — And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. Verse 7 — And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

Hail and fire, mixed with blood, fall on the earth, reminding us of the plagues which afflicted Egypt in Moses' day (Exodus 9:23). It is possible that the "earth" here refers to the "Earth-Beast" of Revelation 13:11, or to the people from which the Beast sprang.

2. SECOND TRUMPET (Chapter 8:8)

Verse 8 — And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; Verse 9 — and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed.

At the blowing of the second trumpet a great burning "mountain" was thrown into the sea. The sea became blood, causing the death of many sea creatures, and many ships were destroyed. This "mountain" may represent the "Sea-Beast" (13:1) which in turn refers to imperial Rome. The mountain, signifying a "kingdom," was thrown into the sea from whence it came, just as the Sea-Beast would be thrown into the "bottomless pit" (17:8). The persecuting power would be destroyed.

3. THIRD TRUMPET (Chapter 8:10-11)

Verse 10 — And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; Verse 11 — and the name of the star is Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

When the third trumpet sounded, a great "star" fell from heaven. The "star," blazing like a torch, probably represents the persecuting imperial power which was to be brought low. "Heaven" here indicates exaltation, not the abode of God. "The star fell from heaven" means that the persecuting power was destroyed (Daniel 8:10). Nebuchadnezzar became strong, his greatness reaching "to heaven" (Daniel 4:22), but God humbled him. So it would be with imperial Rome. When Rome fell, the "rivers" (the lesser authorities which derived their power from Rome) would be affected. The name of the "star" is "Wormwood."

The juices from the plant called "wormwood" were bitter. This signified the bitter effects produced by the Roman persecutions.

4. FOURTH TRUMPET (Chapter 8:12-13)

Verse 12 — And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.

The fourth trumpet signaled the darkening of the sun, the moon and the stars. These heavenly bodies probably represent the Jewish religious authorities and the "light" with which they led the people. Matthew 23 describes the hypocrisy of these leaders and concludes with a pronouncement of doom upon them. "That upon you many come all the righteous blood shed on the earth . . . Verily, I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Matthew 23:35-36). Immediately following this, Matthew records Jesus' prophecy concerning the terrible tribulation soon to come, which would see the city destroyed, the temple burned and many thousands of Jews killed. Using the same words as in Matthew 23:35-36, Jesus again emphatically says: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (Matthew 24:34). In the context of Jerusalem's fall in A. D. 70, Jesus also speaks of the shaking of "the powers of the heavens" (Matthew 24:29).

The first four trumpets may be interpreted to refer to the "Earth-Beast," the "Sea-Beast," the imperial powers and the Jewish religious authorities, showing that their evil actions would result eventually in their own downfall.

Verse 13 — And I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices

of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.

An eagle, or an angel with the appearance of an eagle, announces the last three trumpets which are called “woe” trumpets. These three trumpets signal the end of Judaism, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The trumpets conclude the first half of the Revelation with a view of God’s temple in heaven, showing that while the earthly temple may be destroyed, man is unable to harm God’s spiritual temple, the church (11:19).

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 9 [9:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Consider the fifth trumpet and how the vision develops from smoke to warriors on horseback. Note that the power to hurt was in the horses' tails. What do the tails represent? (Cf. Isaiah 9:13-15).

2. Study a map of the ancient world and see where Babylon was in relation to Judah and Jerusalem. In 586 B. C. Babylon attacked Jerusalem and destroyed it and the temple. Is John using that historical event to symbolize what happened to Jerusalem in A. D. 70?

3. Remember that Jesus foretold a flurry of false prophetism which would precede the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 (cf. Matthew 24:4, 5, 24).

5. FIFTH TRUMPET: FIRST WOE (Chapter 9:1 - 12)

The fifth trumpet is a picture of the preparing desolation of the Jewish state. One should study carefully the prophecy of Joel concerning the approaching destruction of the Jerusalem of his day. Joel depicted enemy soldiers as hordes of locusts which would utterly devastate the country (Joel 1:4; 2:1-11). The same picture is painted in the Revelation.

Verse 1 — And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven fallen unto the earth: and there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss.

The “star” which is pictured as “fallen from Heaven” is probably the same “star” as in 8:10, representing the Roman persecutor. In like manner Isaiah described the king of Babylon as “Day Star, son of Dawn” (Isaiah 14:4, 12), saying that he had “fallen from heaven.” Obviously, this means that the king’s power was greatly diminished by God’s intervention. This is what it must mean in Revelation 9:1, referring to imperial Rome.

The “star” (9:1) receives the key to the abyss, which no doubt means that the Roman persecutors would be operating by the power of Satan.

Verse 2 – And he opened the pit of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

Thick smoke issues from the abyss, obscuring the “sun” and darkening the “air.” This perhaps indicates the diminishing power of the Jewish spiritual leaders (See notes on 6:12).

Verse 3 – And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. Verse 4 – And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads.

Locusts come out of the smoke and are given the power of scorpions to hurt and kill. The power of scorpions is in their tails (vs. 10). The “tail” represents false prophetism (see notes on vs. 10) and was a real threat to the early Christians. The locust-scorpions would, however, be unable to harm God’s children. Jesus had forewarned his disciples: “Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am the Christ; and shall lead many astray . . . For there shall arise false Christs, and

false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24: 4, 5, 24). Josephus tells us that at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem there were many false prophets (*Wars*, Book VI, Chapter 5, Section 2).

Verse 5 — And it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man. Verse 6 — And in those days men shall seek death, and shall in no wise find it: and they shall desire to die, and death fleeth from them.

The locust-scorpions were to torture men for five months, but not kill them. "Five months" was the literal season for locusts, and perhaps refers to the entire period of the siege of Jerusalem. It would then be the same period referred to in Revelation 12:4-6. In this latter passage it is also the dragon's *tail* which sweeps down "the third part of the stars of heaven" but which is unable to harm God's children. Eventually the "False Prophet," here represented by the "tail," shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (19:20-21).

The days of trial would be terrible and many men would prefer death to life. Jesus spoke of "men fainting for fear, and for expectation" of what was coming on the earth in that generation (Luke 21:26, 32).

Verse 7 — And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for war; and upon their heads as it were crowns like unto gold, and their faces were as men's faces. Verse 8 — And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. Verse 9 — And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war. Verse 10 — And they have tails like unto scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men five months.

The locust-scorpions are now described as like horses aligned for battle (cf. Joel 2:4-5). On their heads were crowns of gold, for they were going to conquer. Their human faces indicate that these were human armies. Their long hair and lion teeth describe their fierce nature and are suggested perhaps by the antennae and cutting teeth of locust (Joel 1:4, 6). The scales and noise of locust wings represent the armor and chariots of the Roman armies.

The "tail" of the locust-scorpion, in which resides its power to harm men, represents false prophetism. The "tail" is the "False Prophet" (Isaiah 9:15). We see the "tail" active in Revelation 9:19 and 12:4. The "False Prophet" is further identified in Revelation 16:13 and 20:10.

Verse 11 — They have over them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath the name Apollyon.

The king over these "locusts" is the "angel" of the abyss. His name is *Abaddon* in Hebrew and *Apollyon* in Greek. Both of these names mean *Destroyer*. This is a reference to Satan ("adversary") who is the "prince of demons" (Matthew 12:24, 27), the "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). In the vision at hand, this "angel" seems to be the evil power behind the "star" (9:1). The "star" appears to be the persecuting imperial power (cf. 8:10), whereas the "angel" appears to represent the "dragon" (12:9) who gives his power and great authority to the Beast, which also represents imperial Rome (13:1-2).

6. SIXTH TRUMPET: SECOND WOE (Chapter 9:13 - 21)

Verse 12 — The first Woe is past: behold, there come yet two Woes hereafter. Verse 13 — And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God, Verse 14 — one saying to the

sixth angel that had the trumpet, Loose the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates.

This vision is similar in meaning and symbol to the fifth trumpet. The voice comes from the golden altar before God, so it appears to be the authoritative voice of God. The command to release the four angels who are poised, bound at the great river Euphrates, recalls the armies which in Old Testament times were poised at the Euphrates, ready to attack Israel and Jerusalem. The Assyrians were called "the rod of my anger" (Isaiah 10:5), used by God to chasten a godless and hypocritical Jewish nation (Isaiah 10:6). In A. D. 70, the Roman legions were used in the same way to accomplish God's purpose. In speaking of the A. D. 70 war, Jesus said: "For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22). In Luke 19:44 he said this would be "because thou (Jerusalem) knowest not the time of thy visitation." It is possible that the four "angels" here pictured as restrained at the Euphrates River correspond to the four angels of Revelation 7:1, which are restrained from harming God's elect.

Verse 15 — And the four angels were loosed, that had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they should kill the third part of men. Verse 16 — And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the number of them. Verse 17 — And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates as of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone: and the heads of the horses are as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone. Verse 18 — By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths.

The invading armies are released, two hundred million strong. This too must be treated as a symbolic number, multiples of tens and thousands, indicating completeness and infinity. The meaning is that the number of soldiers is exceedingly great as in Joel 2:2, 11.

The horsemen wore fierce looking breastplates (9:9), and plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur issued from their mouths. A third of mankind are killed by these plagues.

Verse 19 — For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails are like unto serpents, and have heads; and with them they hurt.

The “power” of the horses is in their mouths and their tails. The “tails” represent false prophetism and the horses’ heads represent “the elder and the honored man” (Isaiah 9:15). The hypocrisy and ungodliness of Israel’s honored men, even of the chief priests, contributed greatly in strengthening the hand of the evil doers in the land. See a parallel to this in Jeremiah 23:14-22.

Verse 20 — And the rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk: Verse 21 — and they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

There was still time for repentance, but time was rapidly running out. Soon the mighty angel would stand forth and declare that there would be no more delay (cf. 10:5-6). Instead of repenting, men continued their evil deeds. This is reminiscent of the spiritual condition of Judah in Jeremiah’s day. Read Jeremiah 23 for a picture of false prophetism and unholy “honored men,” whose combined influence hindered the people from repenting. Jeremiah’s Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon; John’s Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 10 [10:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Try some more art work! Draw the scene depicted in this chapter.

2. Read Ezekiel 2:1 - 3:4 and relate the episode of Ezekiel's little book to that of John.

7. INTERMISSION (Chapter 10:1 - 11:13)

As between the sixth and seventh seals (Chapter 7), there is also a dramatic interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. This interlude serves particularly to show that God in his wisdom knows how to distinguish those who belong to him.

a. THE ANGEL AND THE LITTLE BOOK (Chapter 10:1-11)

Verse 1 — And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire;

This messenger from God is clothed in symbol. The cloud in which he is wrapped and his legs like pillars of fire recall that God led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness by a cloud and a pillar of fire (Exodus 14:19-25). The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel; for the Lord fights for them" (Exodus 14:25). This is probably the

meaning here and indeed does comfort God's people. The rainbow over the angel's head reminds us of God's promise to Noah (Genesis 9:13-17). It is a symbol of hope. His face like "the sun" reminds us of the appearance of the heavenly messenger at the tomb (Matthew 28:3), and of our Lord's face at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:2) and in Revelation 1:16.

Verse 2 — and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left upon the earth;

The little scroll represents the message which the angel is going to give to John, perhaps the revelations and visions from Chapter Eleven forward. The "earth" and the "sea" appear to refer to the Sea-Beast and the Earth-Beast of Chapter 13. The angel's message will concern these "beasts".

Verse 3 — and he cried with a great voice, as a lion roareth: and when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices. Verse 4 — And when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

We do not know what the seven thunders represent. Their words were "sealed up." Notice that the little scroll of verse 2 is not sealed. We can know the message contained in it, but the voice of the seven thunders we cannot know. Some things are not meant for humans and are not revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29). This is perhaps a parallel to Paul's experience in II Corinthians 12:3-4.

Verse 5 — And the angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, Verse 6 — and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever,

who created the heaven and the things that are therein, that there shall be delay no longer: Verse 7 — but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.

The angel announces that there will be no more delay (Greek: *chronos*, meaning “time”). The seventh angel’s trumpet would signal the fulfillment of God’s mystery previously announced by the prophets. One of these prophets was Daniel (Daniel 9:27), and Jesus was another (Matthew 24:4-15). When Jesus spoke of the “end” he was not speaking of the end of the world but of the end of the Jewish state. This is evident in the fact that he told “those who are in Judea (to) flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:16, RSV), when they saw the “end” arriving. The seventh trumpet marked this “end.”

Verse 8 — And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me, and saying, Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. Verse 9 — And I went unto the angel, saying unto him that he should give me the little book. And he saith unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey. Verse 10 — And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was made bitter. Verse 11 — And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.

John was told to take the little scroll from the angel and eat it. It would be sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach. This no doubt means that the message would result in both sorrow and joy for John and his readers. It was a message of destruction and ruin, but for God’s elect it was a message of joy and hope. The message concerned “many peoples and nations and tongues and kings” as we shall see. Ezekiel saw a similar vision (Ezekiel 2:8 - 3:3), and its meaning was the same as in the Revelation.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 11

[11:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Review Ezekiel 40-42 in which an angel measures the temple. What was the purpose for this? (Cf. Ezekiel 42:20). How does it relate to Revelation 11:1-2?

2. Study the story of the two Witnesses in the light of Zechariah 4. What do candlesticks represent?

3. Do you see a correlation between the time during which the Witnesses prophesy and the time during which Jerusalem is trodden under foot?

4. Can you relate this vision to the sixth seal? (7:12 - 17)

5. If the sixth seal represents the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 (cf. 11:2, 8), with the destruction of the temple, how would a vision of an "open" heavenly temple fit in?

b. THE TEMPLE IS MEASURED (Chapter 11:1 - 2)

Verse 1 — And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

John is given a rod and told to "measure" 1) the temple of God, 2) the altar, and 3) the worshippers. He was not to measure the "outer court." The temple seems to represent the church, God's spiritual house today (I Peter 2:5 and I Corinthians 3:16, 17). The altar would perhaps

represent the worship in the church. The worshippers are those who follow the Lamb. God is setting his true people apart from those who are in the world. The material temple of the Jews has been destroyed and the "desolator" has caused "sacrifice and offering to cease" (Daniel 9:27), but God's spiritual temple continues. The earthly city is overshadowed by the New Jerusalem.

It may be argued from this verse that the temple at Jerusalem was yet standing, but the objection is not without force that Ezekiel saw a vision in which the temple was measured fourteen years after it had been destroyed (Ezekiel 40:1). In the same way, John could look back on the city's destruction, yet draw a spiritual lesson based on Ezekiel's vision of the measuring of the temple. The lesson remains valid.

Verse 2 — And the court which is without the temple leave without, and measure it not; for it hath been given unto the nations: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

The "holy city" is Jerusalem. The conflict referred to is the same as in Luke 21:20-24, the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. The "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24) is the period during which the "holy city" was to be trampled under foot. This period was to last "forty-two months." I believe this to be symbolic of the entire period of the Roman war against the Jews. This period began in the Spring of A. D. 67 and lasted until the fall of A. D. 70, almost exactly forty-two months. This period is also represented by a thousand two hundred and sixty days (11:3; 12:6), by "a time, and times, and half a time" (12:14), and by "three days and a half" (11:9). See the notes on these passages. Many fanciful theories have been taught concerning the "times of the Gentiles" but I see no valid reason for departing from the historical context of the book of Revelation to find the true meaning.

The “measuring” is to make a distinct separation between that which is approved by God and that which is not, just as in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 42:20). The temple and the worshippers may in John’s vision represent the faithful people of God as opposed to those who are unfaithful. The faithful are preserved; the unfaithful are “trampled under foot.”

c. THE TWO WITNESSES (Chapter 11:3-13)

Verse 3 – And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

During the period of the Jewish rebellion and the siege of Jerusalem, God has two Witnesses, clothed in sackcloth, prophesying in the midst of the city. See the following verses for the meaning of the “Witnesses.”

Verse 4 – These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before the Lord of the earth.

This vision of the two “Witnesses,” or prophets (verses 4-12), is based on Zechariah’s vision of olive trees which represented “the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel” (Zechariah 4:3-6). Where Zechariah saw only one “candlestick” John sees two. He thus makes the two candlesticks to mean the same as the two “olive trees.” These then represent God’s prophets who continue to bear witness to the truth of God, even during Jerusalem’s terrible ordeal.

The picture of the two witnesses is based upon the events of the lives of Elijah and Moses, as we shall shortly see.

Verse 5 – And if any man desireth to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies; and if any man shall desire to hurt them, in this manner must he be killed.

This recalls the events of II Kings 1:5-12, when fire from heaven consumed Elijah's enemies.

Verse 6 — *These have the power to shut the heaven, that it rain not during the days of their prophecy: and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they shall desire.*

Power to "shut the heaven" was given to these Witnesses, so that soothing and refreshing rain would not fall during the time of their prophesying (the forty-two months). Thus Elijah had prayed that no rain would fall, and it did not rain for three and a half years (James 5:17; I Kings 17:1ff). Probably, there is here a reference to Moses as well as to Elijah, for it was Moses who, as God's prophet, turned the waters to blood (Exodus 7:14-19). Note that Moses and Elijah represent the prophets of the Old Testament (cf. Matthew 17:3-8). In this vision they are "killed" and their dead bodies are left in the streets of Jerusalem. Such is the persecution that God's faithful would suffer in Jerusalem. As Jesus said, "Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify . . . that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth . . . Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! . . . Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matthew 23:34-38).

Interpretations which make these two Witnesses the Old and New Testaments seem forced and unnatural. Neither does it seem possible that these symbols identify two literal men in Jerusalem during the siege. I believe they simply refer to true prophetism as opposed to false.

Verse 7 — *And when they shall have finished their testimony the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them.*

The “beast” from the “abyss” (bottomless pit) makes war on the “Witnesses” and “kills” them. This first use of the word “beast” is a reference to the locust-scorpions (9:2-3) which rose out of the bottomless pit. Remember that these represented the false prophetism which would “darken” the air and obscure the sun. God’s true prophets would thus be put down and their message ignored. This corresponds to the situation in Jeremiah’s day (586 B.C.), just before King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (read Jeremiah 38-39).

Verse 8 – And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

The dead bodies of the Witnesses lie in the streets of the “great city.” This is the “holy city” (11:2) which is trampled under foot for “forty-two months.” That it is Jerusalem cannot be contested, for it is there that “their Lord was crucified.” Yet, the “holy city” is called *Sodom* and *Egypt*.

Isaiah spoke of the “faithful city” that had become a “harlot” (Isaiah 1:21), and this is the way she is described in the Revelation. Later on we will again see this “great city” identified as “the harlot” (17:1-6, 18). She will be presented in contrast to the church, the Bride of Christ, dressed in righteousness (19:1-8). Whereas the “great city”, called “Babylon the great” (18:2), was to fall, the New Jerusalem would rise in its stead and endure forever. “New Jerusalem” is another name for the “Bride of Christ” (21:2).

Verse 9 – And from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations do men look upon their dead bodies three days and a half, and suffer not their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. Verse 10 – And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them, and make merry; and they shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth.

True prophetism lies “dead,” apparently defeated, in Jerusalem for “three and a half days.” “Days” here seems to correspond to years. Three and a half years equal forty-two months, the duration of the Jewish rebellion against Rome.

The people rejoice at the “death” of the two prophets of God, for their message had long “tormented” them, even as Ahab had accused Elijah of “troubling” Israel (I Kings 18:17).

Verse 11 – And after the three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them that beheld them. Verse 12 – And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they went up into heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

At the end of the period of the Jewish rebellion God vindicates his prophets. They are “resurrected”, and the world recognizes that God is with his people.

As their foes look on, the true messengers of God are exalted. The reference is to Elijah’s ascension in the fiery chariot (II Kings 2:11), and here signifies God’s approval of those who preach the truth faithfully. It is in opposition to Revelation 9:1 where we see the “star from heaven fallen unto the earth,” meaning its downfall. To be taken up “into heaven” indicates exaltation and approval.

Verse 13 – And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell; and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand persons: and the rest were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem might be compared to a “great earthquake,” sending tremors to the far reaches of the empire. According to the Law, a tenth

part was reserved for God as a "tithe," so here it is possible that God is exacting his due in much the same way in which he had punished Judah, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, for failing to observe the sabbaths of the land (cf. Leviticus 26:33-35; Jeremiah 25:8-11; II Chronicles 36:19-21). The number "thousand" indicates a large number but not an infinite number, while "seven thousand" would indicate that the complete number of those who must perish did perish.

8. SEVENTH TRUMPET: THIRD WOE (Chapter 11:14 - 19)

Verse 14 – The second Woe is past: behold, the third Woe cometh quickly. Verse 15 – And the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Verse 14 prepares our minds for the seventh trumpet, the third Woe, which signals the end of the Jewish state and the exaltation of the Spiritual temple of God.

When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, loud voices in heaven proclaim the victory of the Christ. The transition is complete. The spiritual kingdom of Christ now stands alone where once had stood the physical, worldly kingdom of men. Christ is now clearly seen as Lord and King.

This is a much abridged picture of the triumph of Christ and his church. Actually Christ had already begun to reign over his kingdom (Colossians 1:12-13), but as long as the earthly temple stood and the Levitical priesthood continued to offer sacrifices according to the Law, his Kingship was not fully recognized. Judean Christians would particularly have this problem, as is evidenced by the concern shown by the author of Hebrews 13:10-14.

“For ever and ever” must be understood as referring to the *entire time* of the reign of Christ as defined in God’s eternal purpose. It cannot mean “never ending” in the generally accepted sense, for the New Testament clearly says he would reign *until* the resurrection of the dead, at which time he will give the kingdom back to the Father (I Corinthians 15:24-28).

Verse 16 – And the four and twenty elders, who sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces and worshipped God, Verse 17 – saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast; because thou hast taken thy great power, and didst reign. Verse 18 – And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth.

The twenty-four elders praise God for his justice and goodness. For his justice, because he judged those who persecuted his people. The “nations” (including Herod and Pontius Pilate – Acts 4:25-28) raged, killing Jesus and hunting down the disciples. These disciples are pictured “underneath the altar” (6:9) crying, “How long . . . doest thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” When Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, he said those would be “days of vengeance” (Luke 21:22), a time of judgment. It would also be a time of vindication of God’s children. God would clearly set them forth as his own chosen ones.

Verse 19 – And there was opened the temple of God that is in heaven; and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant; and there followed lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail.

This picture of God's heavenly temple shows that although the earthly temple was destroyed, God's church continues. The fact that the temple is open shows that all men may approach God through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:8, 9; 10:20). God's temple is spiritual, not material, and it was necessary that this fact be demonstrated once and for all.

The veil of the Holy of Holies is open and the ark of the covenant is visible, reminding the church that God's promises are secure.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 12

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Relate the birth of the "man child" (12:2-5) to the events surrounding the actual birth of Christ and the subsequent attempt by Herod to kill him.

2. Remember that the phrase "war in heaven" really describes the spiritual nature of the conflict rather than the site of the conflict. The conflict takes place on earth and affects God's children (the "woman").

3. The object of the vision is to show Christians that God would see them safely through the persecutions and troubles which they would soon face.

4. The images depicting victory and deliverance are drawn from several different Old Testament sources. Compare the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 14-19) with the deliverance of God's church at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70.

V. WAR IN HEAVEN (Chapter 12:1-17)

Chapters twelve through nineteen show the descent of the persecutors on the city of Jerusalem, the destruction of that city and the triumph of God's children.

In this section of the Revelation we will see the following contrasts: 1) the holy woman versus the unholy Harlot (12:1; 17:3; 19:1-9); 2) the False Prophet versus the Word of God (12:4, 9; 13:11, 14; 16:13; 19:11-21; 20:10); 3) the Beast versus the Lamb (13:1, 11; 14:1, 10; 17:12-14; 19:2, 7); 4) the mark of the Beast versus the seal of

God (13:16, 17; 14:1); 5) the wicked city versus the New Jerusalem (14:8, 20; 16:19; 17:1-6, 18: chapter 18; 21:2, 10 - 22:5).

The holy woman is the people of God who remain true to him; the Harlot is the unfaithful Jewish nation, represented by the earthly city of Jerusalem. The Beast represents the persecutors, Roman and domestic; the Lamb is the Christ who battles for his church. The False Prophet is Satan and his followers; the Word of God is Christ and his prophets. The wicked city is earthly Jerusalem; the New Jerusalem is the church. The mark of the Beast is the recognition given to those who worship the image of the emperor; the seal of God is God's approval on his faithful ones.

Verse 1 – And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars;

The woman represents God's faithful people. She is pictured in "heaven" (the sky) with the sun as her robe, the moon her footstool, and twelve stars crowning her head. Remember that the heavenly bodies represent the spiritual "lights" among God's people. When the sixth seal was opened, the sun was blackened and the moon became as blood and the stars fell from the sky (6:12-13). This was a symbol of the downfall of many of the spiritual leaders of Israel. God's people are here pictured ideally in a position of apparent strength and glory.

Verse 2 – and she was with child; and she crieth out, travailing in birth, and in pain to be delivered.

The woman is in labor, about to bear a child. In pain and anguish she cries out for delivery. This is a picture of Israel prior to the birth of Christ. In a period of intense expectancy, the faithful were longing for, crying out for, the long awaited Deliverer (Luke 2:25, 38; 23:50-51).

Verse 3 — And there was seen another sign in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems.

A great Dragon suddenly appears beside the woman. Red signifies his warlike, murderous nature. Seven heads and ten horns identify him with the Sea-Beast to whom the Dragon gives his authority (13:1, 4). The Sea-Beast represents imperial Rome with its various kings. The only difference is that the Dragon is pictured with seven crowns on its heads, while the Sea-Beast has ten crowns on its horns. We will identify the horns and heads in chapter seventeen. Suffice it to say here that the horns represent ten rulers and the heads are the seven prominent rulers among the ten.

Verse 4 — And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon standeth before the woman that is about to be delivered, that when she is delivered he may devour her child.

The Dragon's power is in his tail, with which he swept down a third of the stars of heaven. These stars, or spiritual leaders, are cast to the earth, a figure of defeat. This is the power of the False Prophet (Isaiah 9:14-15).

The Dragon then stood before the woman in labor, in order to devour the baby as soon as it was born. This recalls Herod's frantic attempts to destroy the Christ child (Matthew 2:7-18).

Verse 5 — And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne.

The male child is obviously the Christ, the "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4), for it is he who rules, or "shepherds," with a rod of iron (see notes on 2:27).

The Dragon was not able to destroy the child who was caught up to God's throne. This is an allusion to the exaltation of Jesus, following his crucifixion and resurrection. Being "caught up" to heaven represents victory. To be "cast down" from heaven signifies defeat.

Verse 6 – And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

The woman fled into the wilderness to a place God had prepared. This is perhaps an allusion to the flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus into Egypt, but has to do with the safekeeping of God's faithful during the time when Jerusalem was trampled under foot by the nations (11:2-3). While the unfaithful, those who were not "measured" (11:2), were trampled, the faithful, those who were "measured" (11:1), were preserved. Jesus had promised that "for the sake of the elect" those days (of tribulation) would be "shortened" (Matthew 24:22). This foretold that God would preserve the elect during the destruction of Jerusalem. Flavius Josephus, an eyewitness to all this, recounts that in the beginning of the war the Roman armies, under Cestius Gallus, besieged Jerusalem and almost took the city, but "without having received any disgrace, he retired from the city, without any reason in the world" (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book II, Chap. 19, Section 7). This was in the twelfth year of Nero's reign. Josephus then recounts that many Jews left Jerusalem, knowing that the Romans would return in greater force. (*Wars*, Book II, Chapter 20, Section 1). This would have been an opportune time for Christian Jews to flee the city, in accordance with Jesus' words: "But when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that her desolation is at hand. Then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of her depart

out; and let not them that are in the country enter therein. For these are days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-22). Eusebius, a Christian historian (c. 324 A. D.), states that the church in Jerusalem fled across the Jordan to the village of Pella, where they remained till the end of the war. (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Chapter 5, Section 3).

Verse 7 — And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels;

"War in heaven" does not mean war where God's throne is. It depicts a spiritual battle between the armies of God and Satan's army. Michael, the archangel, is pictured several times as fighting the battles of the Lord's people. He came to the aid of Daniel in one of his visions (Daniel 10:13, 21). He "contended" with the devil "about the body of Moses" (Jude 9). Jude is not speaking of the literal body of Moses, as many suppose, but is referring to Jerusalem in the same way in which the church is the "body of Christ." Jude's reference is to Zechariah's vision (Zechariah 3:1-2). Satan desired the ruin of Jerusalem, but Michael said to him, "The *Lord* rebuke thee!" In the same way, Satan the Dragon desired the ruin of God's faithful, but Michael comes to their aid. Michael represents God's divine intervention.

Verse 8 — and they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. Verse 9 — And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him.

The Dragon is identified as being the Devil and Satan, the old Serpent who deceived Eve and who has been deceiving mankind ever since. Satan and his angels are "cast

down to the earth” – the opposite of being taken up “into heaven” (11:12; 12:5). When Jesus sent the seventy disciples out with power to cast out demons, they returned with joy. He told them, “I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven . . . Nevertheless, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you . . .” (Luke 10:17-20). To “fall from heaven” is to be made subject to someone. In this case it is Satan who is made subject to God’s ministers.

Verse 10 – And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night.

A loud voice in heaven proclaims the victory in behalf of God’s people. Satan, the “accuser of our brethren,” is cast down in defeat. This expression recalls how Satan accused Job, but was proved wrong (Job 1:9-11).

Verse 11 – And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death.

God’s faithful overcome Satan through the blood of Christ and the word of God. They are “faithful unto death” (2:10). They do not attempt to “save” their lives (Mark 8:35), knowing that their reward is in God’s hands.

Verse 12 – Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea: because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.

While God’s faithful rejoice, knowing that they have the victory, the earth and the sea (the unfaithful) will bear the wrath of Satan. He knows his time is “short.”

Verse 13 — *And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child.*

When Satan saw that he was defeated by Christ he turned his wrath upon the followers of Christ, represented by the woman. Note that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother, one who was faithful to God. Mary thus represented the people of God. But the woman continued, in the vision, as a symbol of God's church, which is persecuted by Satan's forces.

Verse 14 — *And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.*

As God delivered Israel from Egypt with a mighty hand, so he carries the church to safety on "the wings of the great eagle" (cf. Exodus 19:4). See the note on 12:6 concerning the flight of the church across the Jordan to Pella.

The "time, and times, and half a time" correspond to the period of twelve hundred and sixty days (12:6). Thus it refers to the period of the Jewish war with Rome. There appear to be three and a half "times," or years. Observe that in Daniel 4:17, 25, a "time" appears to be a year, or a complete revolution of the seasons.

Verse 15 — *And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman water as a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. Verse 16* — *And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth.*

Satan, the Serpent, attempted to destroy the fleeing church with a flood of propaganda. But God's elect were forewarned by Christ (Matthew 24:23-24), and were not deceived by the flood of deception from Satan's mouth. But the "earth," the unconverted populations of Palestine, was deceived and swept away.

Verse 17 – And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus:

Having been unsuccessful in his attempts to harm the male child (12:5) or to deceive the woman (12:13-14), the Dragon went off and began persecuting the rest of the woman's offspring. These are the church in other places, for it is evident that Christians all over the empire would suffer for Christ.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 13

[13:1-2]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Compare the Sea-Beast in his various aspects with the four beasts of Daniel 7. He incorporates them all.
2. Check the references on the Earth-Beast (13:11) and identify him as the False Prophet (19:20).
3. Study carefully the "mark of the Beast." Remember that it represents the approval of the False Prophet and is a counterfeit of God's seal of approval (7:3).

VI. TWO BEASTS (Chapter 13:1-18)

A. THE BEAST FROM THE SEA (Chapter 13:1-10)

Verse 1 — and he stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. Verse 2 — And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority.

Some ancient manuscripts read, "And I stood," making John the subject of the sentence. The oldest and most authoritative texts, however, read "And he stood," referring to the Dragon. The Dragon is pictured as awaiting the arrival of the Sea-Beast.

There is every reason to identify the Sea-Beast with imperial Rome. The description of this beast corresponds perfectly to Daniel's vision of the four beasts (Daniel 7). First, let us look at Daniel's vision.

Daniel's vision: The four beasts arose from the sea. These beasts represent "four kings" or "kingdoms" which would arise (Daniel 7:17).

The first beast (Daniel 7:4) was like a lion with eagle's wings. The winged lion was the symbol of the Babylonian empire begun by king Nebuchadnezzar. This beast corresponds to the "head of gold" in Daniel's vision (Daniel 2:32-38).

The second beast (Daniel 7:5) was like a bear. This was the Persian empire which overthrew Babylon. This beast corresponds to the "breast and arms of silver" of the great statue (Daniel 2:32, 39).

The third beast (Daniel 7:6) was like a leopard, with four wings on its back and four heads. This beast represented the Greek empire established by Alexander the Great, and corresponds to the "belly and thighs of bronze" of the great statue (Daniel 2:32, 39). The four wings seem to indicate the terrible swiftness with which Alexander would conquer the great Persian empire. The four heads were Alexander's four generals who partitioned the empire after his untimely death.

The fourth beast (Daniel 7:7) was stronger and more terrifying than the others. It had great iron teeth and ten horns. This beast corresponds to the legs and feet of the great statue (Daniel 2:33, 40-43), and represented the Roman empire which succeeded the Greek empire. The "iron" indicated the great strength of this fourth kingdom. The "horns" of the beast (7:7) and the "toes" of the statue (2:41) represented "ten kings" which would arise "out of this kingdom" (Daniel 7:24). These were ten Roman rulers which would be prominent in the history of God's people. During the days of those kings God would set up his "eternal kingdom" (Daniel 2:44).

Each successive kingdom of Daniel's visions incorporated within itself the strength of the preceding kingdoms. So when the "little stone" struck the "feet of iron and clay" of the great statue (Daniel 2:34, 35), it was as though the entire statue was broken to pieces.

Now let us consider the Sea-Beast of the Revelation. The Sea-Beast rose out of the sea, as did Daniel's four beasts. It had ten horns which mean the same as the horns of Daniel's fourth beast. They are Rome's rulers (see notes on Revelation 17:10-12). The "heads" are also "seven kings" and appear to be superior to the "horns." The seven "heads" seem to be "horns" which have attained greater status, as we shall discuss when we come to Revelation 17:10-12.

This Beast has a "blasphemous name upon its heads" (13:1), which refers to the Roman emperors' claim to be gods. This claim would lead them to persecute the Christians who refused to worship them. The Jews had been exempted from the worship of Rome's gods, but non-Jewish converts to Christianity were not exempted and were expected by Rome to offer sacrifices like other Romans.

The Sea-Beast bears characteristics of the four beasts of Daniel's vision (Daniel 7:3-7), and is thus identified as imperial Rome. The Dragon, Satan, granted to this persecuting government "his power, and his throne, and great authority" (13:2).

Verse 3 — And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed; and the whole earth wondered after the beast;

One of the Sea-Beast's heads was mortally wounded, but the mortal wound was healed. The whole earth was amazed and followed the Beast. This seems to be a reference to the events surrounding the death of Nero.

When Nero had abused his authority to such a degree that his closest associates plotted to kill him and even his

guards deserted him, he ran away into the country, accompanied by four trusted freedmen. Nero asked his servants to kill him, but when they refused he took his own life. His body was hidden and never found. This gave rise to rumors that Nero was not dead but would return at the head of an army. A number of men tried to persuade people in various parts of the empire that they were Nero. A slave who did this succeeded in raising a small army of followers and occupied the island of Cyprus, but he was killed and his body was brought back to Rome to prove he was not Nero.

John appears here to say that although Nero, the first persecuting emperor, was dead, persecution would not cease. For another ruler would arise who would continue the same evil work begun by Nero. Just as John the Baptist came in "the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:12-13), another emperor would arise who would be like Nero. This seems to be the meaning of Revelation 17:10-11.

Verse 4 — and they worshipped the dragon, because he gave his authority unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? and who is able to war with him?

It is no wonder that men everywhere worshipped the Dragon. Men usually go along with the stronger party when it appears useless to fight against it.

Verse 5 — and there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and there was given to him authority to continue forty and two months. Verse 6 — And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, even them that dwell in the heaven.

As the Roman emperor became proud, he became blasphemous and haughty, much as the Assyrian king had

done in Hezekiah's time (Isaiah 37:8-12). The Romans did not realize that their acts of barbarity and destruction would fall back on them. The "name" of God and his "dwelling" in Jerusalem meant nothing to them. The forty-two months refer to the period of duration of the war against the Jews, which culminated in A. D. 70 (see notes on 11:2).

Verse 7 — And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

The Romans would be allowed to persecute God's people and to conquer them, though their "victory" would be short-lived. The persecutors would extend their evil works into all nations.

Verse 8 — And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain.

All those who were not God's children would submit to Rome's dictate and would worship the emperor. John emphasizes that those who do submit to emperor-worship show thereby that their names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. Any person, therefore, who calls himself a Christian must renounce salvation in Christ if he worships the Beast. This passage does not hint that any person was predestined to worship the Beast or not to worship it, but rather simply states in plain language that those who do are not included among the saved.

The phrase "from the foundation of the world" properly follows the word "slain," in the Greek text. The verse should read: "every one whose name hath not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain

from the foundation of the world.” There is no textual authority for the reading as it stands in the American Standard Version which is used as the text for this commentary. The KJV reading on this verse follows more closely the original Greek text.

Verse 9 – If any man hath an ear, let him hear.

Verse 10 – If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth: if any man shall kill with the sword, with the sword must he be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

A warning is in order for the persecuting powers. It is also a word of hope for the Christians. Those who busy themselves in the persecution of God’s people will themselves be destroyed! This is the message of Paul to the Thessalonians: “It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you” (II Thessalonians 1:6).

The Revised Standard Version (RSV) interprets the Greek phrase to mean “if anyone *is to be taken* into captivity,” whereas Nestle’s Greek text contains no verb at all. Thus the phrase may be understood in a quite different sense. The “Textus Receptus” from which the King James Version is translated has the verb *sunagō*, which may bear the meaning of “to lead” or “to gather.” The verse may therefore refer to the leading of Christians and Jews into captivity by the Romans. This better suits the context of the verse. Not only so, but the two parts of the verse (“He that leadeth” . . . and “He that killeth”) are parallel, both together showing that the oppressor will be finally judged. The force of the verse is lost if the first part is made passive while the second is made active, as the RSV does.

B. THE BEAST FROM THE LAND (13:11-18)

Verse 11 — And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. Verse 12 — And he exerciseth all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And he maketh the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed.

This beast is different in aspect from the Sea-Beast, who was terrifying and warlike, blood red in color. The Earth-Beast appears to be gentle, even lamb-like. But he is obviously a counterfeit, a fake, for his voice is that of a dragon. The Dragon is Satan with all his deceitfulness. Through this beast the devil deceives men to make them do the bidding of the Sea-Beast. This Earth-Beast is identified later (19:20) as the "False Prophet" who, in the presence of the Sea-Beast, worked the signs which deceived men.

The Earth-Beast took on the aspect of a lamb in imitation of the Lamb of God, yet his voice was that of Satan. He caused people to worship the Roman emperor (the beast who appeared to be resurrected) instead of Christ who was truly raised from the dead. The two lamb-like horns simply recall the two Witnesses (11:3, 10), as the Beast attempts to imitate the truth. The obvious meaning of these symbols is that false prophetism would come to the aid of the Roman persecutors, even as Jesus had foretold (Matthew 24:24).

Verse 13 — And he doeth great signs, that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men.

The Earth-Beast (or False Prophet) imitated God's prophet Elijah by making fire come down from heaven. (See the notes on 11:4-5).

Verse 14 — And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs which it was given him to do

in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived.

The False Prophet urged men to erect images of the Sea-Beast and to worship him. This signifies the emperor worship which was enforced upon the people by first and second century emperors of Rome.

Verse 15 – And it was given unto him to give breath to it, even to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

Pagan priests employed trickery to deceive the ignorant. By speaking from within the idol they made the people believe the god was speaking.

Those who refused to worship the statue of the emperor were to be slain, as in Daniel's day (Daniel 3:5-6). When faithful Christians refused to comply with the imperial order, many thousands of them were slain.

Verse 16 – And he causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead;

Those who obeyed the order to worship or to offer sacrifices to the image of the emperor received a "mark." This probably refers to a certificate which the image worshipper received from the attending priests, attesting that the named individual had indeed offered the prescribed sacrifice. This certificate was signed by the priest as an official of the Roman government. The mark is said to be placed on the right hand or forehead in imitation of the "seal" which God placed on his faithful (7:3; 14:1). The seal is the "name" of the Lamb, and signifies all the qualities which are bound up in the name "Christian."

Thus, the apostle Peter, preparing Christians for the "fiery trial" which was coming upon them (I Peter 4:12), urged them to suffer "for the name of Christ," to suffer "as a Christian" without shame (I Peter 4:14, 16). A time of "judgment" had arrived and God's "house" was going to bear the brunt of it. The faithful could count on God's sustaining power, but what would the unfaithful and disobedient have to keep them in the hour of trial (I Peter 4:17-19)?

Verse 17 — and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast or the number of his name.

People who did not have this certificate, or "mark of the beast," were not permitted to buy or sell at the market place. This was added incentive for everyone to comply with the imperial order to worship the emperor's statue, and no doubt many Christians wavered. In order to avoid these difficulties, as well as the persecution which was sure to come, some did offer the sacrifices to the image. This caused a great problem for the early church. What should be done about those who thus fell back, even momentarily, into idolatry? The church was at first unanimous and refused them the fellowship of the faithful. Even after the persecution abated, when these "fallen" desired forgiveness they found that they were not welcome in the church. They had worshipped the Beast.

The "mark" is further identified as the "name" of the Beast or the "number" of its name. (See the notes on 13:18).

Verse 18 — Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six.

The "number" of the Beast is that of a "man." This number (six hundred and sixty-six) has been the object of varied interpretations over the centuries. It has been made to fit numerous important historical persons who appeared in the eyes of the various interpreters to be "beasts." Thus, great reformers such as Luther and Calvin, popes such as Benedict IX and Paul V, dictators such as Napoleon Bonaparte or Hitler, have been seen in this symbol. Protestants have often interpreted the "number" by taking the Latin phrase *VICARIVS FILII DEI* and computing the value of the number-letters. Thus, "Vicar of the Son of God" (a title claimed by the Roman Pope) equals 666. But is this the true interpretation? Why overlook plausible interpretations which are within the immediate historical context of the Revelation?

We have already identified the Sea-Beast as imperial Rome. The reference to the "death-stroke" ("mortal wound," RSV) is to the death of Nero (more on this when we come to 17:10-11). Does the number 666 further witness to this identification? Indeed, the name *NERON KAISER* (Nero Caesar), as it is written in Hebrew, has the numerical value of 666. Now, in spite of the fact that this method of computing values for names presents problems and has spawned many fantastic interpretations, we must still recognize that such cryptograms were not uncommon in Jewish symbolism. Furthermore, we must admit that the extravagant notions of some do not completely invalidate this method of interpreting this "number."

However, we need to mention another possible meaning of 666. Instead of thinking of this number in a *quantitative* sense, let us view it *qualitatively*. For example, "seven" can indicate a certain number of objects when taken quantitatively. But taken qualitatively, "seven" indicates perfection or completeness. It is rather in this qualitative sense that we have treated almost all the other numerical symbols in the Revelation. Now, if "seven" is the symbol of perfection, "six" represents a deceit, a sham,

that which appears to be perfect yet falls short of perfection. "Three" is the symbol of divinity in Hebrew and Greek symbology. Since the Sea-Beast was claiming to be a god, it would be pictured as 666 (ie. six, three times) instead of only 6. In other words, following this line of interpretation, the number of the Beast is symbolic of *counterfeit deity*. This characterized the Roman emperor.

NOTES ON II THESSALONIANS 2:3-12. It appears to me that the apostle Paul here speaks of the same things of which John speaks in the Revelation. Nero was certainly a "man of sin" ("lawlessness" RSV), a "son of perdition" (vs. 3). He desired to be worshipped as deity and his actions against God's people set him against God (vs. 4). The "lawlessness" which would prepare and initiate Nero's evil work was already becoming obvious (vs. 7). The emperor's "coming" would be with power and pretended signs (vs. 9; cf. Revelation 13:13-14), and many would be deceived and led away from the truth (vs. 10; cf. Revelation 13:14).

Many commentators interpret this passage as if Paul were speaking of Papal Rome instead of imperial Rome. But Paul said "the mystery of lawlessness" was already at work at the time of that writing. The Catholic apostasy did not begin so soon. But in 56 or 57 A.D. the time of persecution was already drawing very near. The Zealots had been a growing menace to peace in Palestine for forty years. In scarcely ten more years they would precipitate the war with Rome which would wipe out the Jewish state and destroy the temple.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 14 [14:1]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Compare the victory celebration on Mount Zion (14:1-5) with Chapter 7. Would the group in 14:1 include both multitudes of Chapter 7?
2. Note the seven angels of Chapter 14 and the other personage "like unto the Son of man."
3. Can we identify the "city" (14:20) with Jerusalem (cf. 11:2, 8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 24)?

VII. THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION (14:1-20)

A message of comfort is in order following the vision of the two beasts. The principal concern of the Revelation is to encourage Christians to patience and faithfulness in times of persecution and distress. John's vision in verses 1-7 is one of hope and victory.

Verse 1 – And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.

The 144,000 who stand with the victorious Lamb of God on Mount Zion are "sealed" with God's name. They are his and stand exalted in glorious contrast to the pitiful multitudes who follow the Beast and worship his image.

The 144,000 here appear to represent all the redeemed of God, not just Jews as in 7:4-8.

Verse 2 — And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: Verse 3 — and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth.

The redeemed are singing a “new song” in the presence of God. Their voice of praise is harmonious like the sound of the harp, majestic as the resounding waves on the rocky shore, and overwhelming as the loud, rolling thunder.

The “new song” is unknown to all except themselves. Only the redeemed can understand its meaning, for it is a song of victory, comprehended only by the victorious. It is doubtless the same as in 15:3, 4, the “song of Moses and the Lamb.”

Verse 4 — These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb. Verse 5 — And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish.

The 144,000 are described as being *faithful* to God (not adulterous), *obedient* (they follow the Lamb wherever he goes), *truthful* (no lie or hypocrisy is in them), and *without compromise* (spotless). They are the opposite of those who compromise their faith and convictions in order to escape persecution. They are like a precious wave offering of the firstfruits of the harvest (Leviticus 23:10-11).

Verse 6 – And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having eternal good tidings to proclaim unto them that dwell on the earth, and unto every nation and tribe and tongue and people; Verse 7 – and he saith with a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made the heaven and the earth and sea and fountains of waters.

This vision begins a succession of angels and “voices” from heaven. The first symbolizes the beginning of the Christian age, when the disciples were sent out to proclaim the Good News to all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). As was true of the message of the “little book” which John ate (Revelation 10:9-11), the gospel message is both sweet and bitter, for it spells destruction and loss to those who do not reverence God.

Verse 8 – And another, a second angel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

The second angel’s message is one of doom. “Babylon the great” is fallen. This “Babylon” is the “Harlot” of 17:1, the “great city” of 17:18, identified in 11:8 as the city “where their Lord was crucified.” It is Jerusalem and not Rome. This is a picture of Jerusalem’s fall in A. D. 70.

Verse 9 – And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshippeth the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, Verse 10 – he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: Verse 11 – and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name.

The third angel proclaims God's wrath on those who submit to emperor worship, and who thus receive the "mark" (see notes on 13:16-17). Those who thought to escape wrath by complying with the imperial decree would see their cup overflow with the wrath of God (cf. Isaiah 51:17). They would not escape. As the ancient city of Sodom had been destroyed by fire and brimstone (Genesis 19:24), so Jerusalem, named "Sodom and Egypt" in Revelation 11:8 was destroyed. In like manner all the unfaithful would suffer punishment. As the smoke of Sodom's destruction could be seen from a great distance, "like the smoke of a furnace" (Genesis 19:28), the "smoke" of the "torment" of the unfaithful would be great. This torment would be "for ever and ever." Those who worshipped the Beast would "have no rest, day or night" (14:11). This terrifying picture, symbolic of "eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (II Thessalonians 1:9), should be sufficient to prevent any man from worshipping the Beast.

Verse 12 — Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

John again urges Christians to be patient in those times of trouble. Through faith and obedience to God they would be saved.

Verse 13 — And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them.

This verse is the second of seven "blessings" or "beatitudes" found in the Revelation. The others are in 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.

The Christian who dies in the Lord is "happy" (Greek: *makarios*). Many thousands would soon be called before the executioner to claim this blessing. These martyrs would find "rest from their labors" and their works would "follow them." Jesus had promised rest to his faithful (Matthew 11:28, 29; II Thessalonians 1:7; Hebrews 4:9-11). The good works of God's children "follow" them in the sense that their example continues to live and bear fruit.

Verse 14 — And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud I saw one sitting like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. Verse 15 — And another angel came out from the temple, crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. Verse 16 — And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth; and the earth was reaped.

The one "like unto a son of man" may well represent Christ in his capacity as reaper. With a sharp sickle and at the proper hour he reaps the ripened harvest. This is a symbol of the death of the righteous martyrs of the persecutions soon to come.

Verse 17 — And another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. Verse 18 — And another angel came out from the altar, he that hath power over fire; and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. Verse 19 — And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great winepress, of the wrath of God. Verse 20 — And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from

the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

Another “reaper” with a sharp sickle is prepared to gather the ripe grapes and to throw them into the “great wine press of the wrath of God.” The angel “who has power over fire” (verse 18) appears to be the same one who took fire from the altar and threw it on the earth (8:5). It is he who announces the gathering of the “clusters.” The ripe grapes are thrown into the wine press and “trodden without the city.” The grape juice represents the blood which flowed during the Jewish war with Rome, from one end of Palestine to the other, for 1,600 furlongs or stadia, about 200 miles.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 15

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Review the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and compare it with 15:1-4.

2. Compare the victory scene of 15:1-4 with that of 14:1-5. This is the main thrust of John's Revelation.

3. Notice again the seven angels (15:6). Are they the same as in Chapter 14? Can it be that the activities of the angels in Chapter 14 are explained again in different terms in the seven bowls of wrath?

4. Observe that these angels are clothed in priestly garments and that they come "out of the temple." Remember the seven angels of Chapter 8 blew seven trumpets of wrath and that this appeared to be in answer to the prayers of the saints under the altar (cf. 8:1-5; 6:9-11). Do a little thinking about the priestly function of these messengers of God as they fight for us (cf. Revelation 12:7; Daniel 10:12-13; Zechariah 3:1-10).

VIII. SEVEN PLAGUES (15:1 - 16:21)

A. INTRODUCTORY VISION OF VICTORY (15:1-8)

This chapter is a majestic picture of God's greatness and glory, designed to strengthen the faithful in the hour of trial. The destruction of Jerusalem is vividly described here and through Chapter Eighteen. The Bible student will be able to see a parallel between Jerusalem's fall in A. D. 70 and the overthrow of Pharaoh in Moses' time. There are

also allusions to the fall of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in B. C. 586.

Verse 1 — And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having seven plagues, which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God.

Seven angels with seven “plagues” appear, recalling those which God sent upon Egypt (Exodus 7:14ff). With these plagues the wrath of God will be ended.

Verse 2 — And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that come off victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the sea of glass, having harps of God.

Just as the Jews under Moses crossed the Red Sea, overcoming the Egyptians by faith, God’s children in the first century would conquer the Roman “Beast” and stand on the victory side of the sea (cf. Exodus 14:21-31). A “sea of glass mingled with fire” would be a bubbly, turbulent sea, angry and terrifying. But the Lord would lead his people safely through it to the victory on the far side.

Verse 3 — And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages. Verse 4 — Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest.

They would praise God, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. This is a victory song similar to that which Moses and the people of Israel sang after escaping their Egyptian persecutors (Exodus 15:1ff).

Verse 5 – And after these things I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: Verse 6 – and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, arrayed with precious stone, pure and bright, and girt about their breasts with golden girdles. Verse 7 – And one of the four living creatures gave unto the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. Verse 8 – And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and none was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished.

The vision is of the tabernacle of God. The “temple of the tent” is the “most holy place” within the tabernacle. It is there that God’s presence was symbolized by the shekinah on the ark of the covenant (I Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 99:1; Hebrews 9:5).

The seven angels dressed in priestly garments come out of the Most Holy Place. They are ministers of God, doing his bidding. Seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God are given to them and the smoke (from these bowls) fills the temple. This smoke is symbolic of God’s glory and power, and is so thick that no one can enter until the plagues are ended. The seven bowls of wrath appear to be simply an expansion of the symbol in Revelation 8:5. There the angel took the same golden censer which had contained the martyrs’ prayers and threw fire on the earth. This same angel later gives the signal to “gather the clusters” of ripe grapes and to throw them into the wine press of God’s wrath (14:18-20). In Chapter Fifteen, the “golden censer” becomes “seven golden bowls” filled with the wrath of God, signifying that this really marks the finish.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 16 [16:1-2]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Compare the plagues of the seven bowls with the plagues which God sent upon the Egyptians in Exodus 7 - 11.
2. Compare the seven bowls with the seven trumpets and observe that they seem to be parallel, describing the same events in different terms.
3. Remember that these plagues represent God's judgment upon the "great city" (cf. 11:8) for what this city had done to God's "saints and prophets" (16:5-7). Read Jesus' words about Jerusalem in Matthew 23:34-39; Luke 13:33-35.

B. THE BOWLS OF WRATH (16:1-21)

This chapter contains the visions of the seven bowls of God's wrath. As we shall see, the bowls are parallel to the seven trumpets.

1. FIRST BOWL (16:1-2)

Verse 1 — And I heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, Go ye, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth. Verse 2 — And the first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and that worshipped his image.

The first plague afflicts the earth and those who worshipped the image of the Beast. God punishes those who lapsed into idolatry, worshipping the statue of the emperor. If the "earth" of the first trumpet (8:7) represented the "Earth-Beast," remember that, as the "False Prophet," he represented the deceitful teachers who caused men to worship the image of the Sea-Beast (13:11-16).

2. SECOND BOWL (16:3)

Verse 3 – And the second poured out his bowl into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living soul died, even the things that were in the sea.

This measure of wrath is poured into the sea causing it to coagulate like a dead man's blood, and all life in the sea died. The "sea" represents the turbulent peoples of the Roman empire from whose depths the Sea-Beast came. This is a sign of the ultimate destruction of the Roman empire and its persecuting power and parallels the second trumpet (8:8-9).

3. THIRD BOWL (16:4-7)

Verse 4 – And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters; and it became blood. Verse 5 – And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous art thou, who art and who wast, thou Holy One, because thou didst thus judge: Verse 6 – for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and blood hast thou given them to drink: they are worthy. Verse 7 – And I heard the altar saying, Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

As in the third trumpet (8:10), the "rivers" seem to be the lesser authorities who derived their power from Rome. Jerusalem itself, as a satellite power of Rome, would be included in the "rivers and fountains of water."

The Jews had indeed cried out, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:12-15). Their ruler, Herod, had joined with Pontius Pilate in the execution of Jesus (Acts 4:25-28). It is to Jerusalem that the words of the "angel of water" first apply: "For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets . . ." (16:6). Jesus had prophesied that upon Jerusalem would "come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah . . ." (Matthew 23:29-37).

This cry from the "altar" apparently comes from the martyred "souls" under the altar (6:9-10), because of the justice of his judgments. The seven bowls of God's wrath appear to be in response to the prayers of the martyrs.

4. FOURTH BOWL (16:8-9)

Verse 8 — And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given unto it to scorch men with fire. Verse 9 — And men were scorched with great heat: and they blasphemed the name of God who hath the power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory.

The intent of this plague was to make men repent and give God the glory. The vision corresponds to the fourth trumpet (8:12), yet the sun is affected differently. Whatever may be the meaning of this vision, it appears that the Jewish religious leaders are affected. (See notes on 8:12).

5. FIFTH BOWL (16:10-11)

Verse 10 — And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom was darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, Verse 11 — and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they repented not of their works.

The fifth bowl is poured out on the throne of the Sea-Beast. As in the days of the Egyptian Pharaoh, the

Roman emperor-beast would know the anguish of darkness before he was through, yet no repentance would be forthcoming.

6. SIXTH BOWL (16:12-16)

Verse 12 – And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way might be made ready for the kings that come from the sunrising. Verse 13 – And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits, as it were frogs: Verse 14 – for they are spirits of demons, working signs; which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. Verse 15 – (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.) Verse 16 – And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.

This bowl is poured out on the Euphrates River, drying up its water so that the invading kings could enter. This vision is based upon the historical fact of the capture of Babylon the night of Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5:24-30). Darius the Mede had spent many months digging a channel to divert the waters of the Euphrates around the city of Babylon instead of through it. The work was completed and the direction of the river changed while the confident Babylonians feasted, secure within their walls. The armies of Darius marched into the city on dry ground and took it almost without a fight. The vision of the sixth bowl is a picture of Jerusalem's fall in A. D. 70. This vision corresponds to the sixth trumpet (9:13-21) where the enemy troops are poised at the Euphrates, ready to strike at Jerusalem. The "kings from the sunrising" ("east" RSV) represent Rome's armies.

The Beast, the Dragon, and the False Prophet worked together to effect Jerusalem's downfall (verse 13). Frogs have long been a symbol of magical power and here represent Satan's deceiving workers. The frogs are pictured as messengers to Rome's various subject kingdoms, calling them to come and join the battle against Jerusalem.

This is the battle of "the great day of God the Almighty." It took place at Har-Magedon (Armageddon, KJV), the "mountain of Megiddo" (verse 16).

"Har-Magedon" is a word compounded from two Hebrew words, usually thought to be "Har" (mountain) and "Magedo" (Megiddo). J. H. Thayer notes that the word can be regarded as a compound of "Harma" (destruction) and "Magedo." Megiddo was an ancient Canaanite city in the territory of Manasseh (west) on the southern edge of the valley of Jezreel. The valley of Jezreel, a great fertile triangle bounded by Mount Carmel on the west, Mount Tabor on the northeast, and Mount Gilboa on the southeast, was often a battleground, situated as it was at the northern entrance of Israel's territory. Megiddo was one of the cities which Solomon fortified (I Kings 9:15), and where he garrisoned many soldiers and chariots. Many battles were fought on the plains of Megiddo, but perhaps King Josiah's battle against Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (II Chronicles 35:20-24) is the best remembered. Because decisive battles, for and against Israel, were waged in this valley, it became the symbol for the great war of A. D. 67 - 70.

Zechariah the prophet spoke of this battle (Zech. 14:1-5). All nations would gather against Jerusalem and would conquer her (cf. Luke 21:20-24). The Lord is pictured as standing on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4) as the city is ravaged. Titus, the Roman general, was in a real sense the representative of God in the destruction of the city. During the siege of Jerusalem, Titus was encamped on the Mount of Olives. Daniel foretold the coming of Titus as "the prince who is to come (to) destroy the city

and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26). But the "decreed end" was to be "poured out on the desolator" (Daniel 9:27). This predicted that "the Lord (would) go forth and fight against those nations" that so desolated Jerusalem (Zech. 14:3).

Verse 15 is a parenthesis inserted into the vision at a dramatic point, to warn the faithful to remain watchful and prepared. This is the third "beatitude" of the Revelation (see on 1:3).

7. SEVENTH BOWL (16:17-21)

Verse 17 — And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air; and there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne, saying, It is done: Verse 18 — and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there were men upon the earth, so great an earthquake, so mighty. Verse 19 — and the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. Verse 20 — And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. Verse 21 — And great hail, every stone about the weight of a talent, cometh down out of heaven upon men: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof is exceeding great.

This section corresponds to the seventh trumpet with its lightning, noises, and earthquake (11:15-19). The earthquake is described as "such as was not since there were men upon the earth," language similar to that used by Jesus to describe the "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21). The "great city" was split asunder by the "earthquake." Other cities in neighboring nations fell and God's wrath was poured out on "great Babylon." This great city seems to be none other than Jerusalem (cf. 11:8). See the notes on chapters seventeen and eighteen.

The "islands" fled away from the city in its death throes. They represent the nomadic tribes which seemed to "float" about on the "sea" of the earth's populations and which came to the city for purposes of trade (cf. 18:11, 15, 17, 19). These now stay far away from the city in distress.

"Mountains" (verse 20) are symbolic of kings or kingdoms, and there is not one willing to come to Jerusalem's aid. Though they were quite willing to "commit fornication" with her, they offer her no aid in her war with Rome. In Jeremiah's day, when the Babylonian empire was threatening to attack Jerusalem, Judah's king frantically sent out appeals for help to Egypt and to Assyria (Jeremiah 2:18). Jeremiah said that Egypt and Assyria were like "lovers" who would put Judah "to shame" (Jeremiah 2:33-37). So it was in A. D. 70. No ruler dared lift a hand to save Jerusalem from her fate.

A plague of "great hail, every stone about the weight of a talent," fell on the city. Josephus tells us that the Romans literally rained huge stones down upon the besieged cities of the Jews. Their machines of war hurled stones "so great, that they carried away the pinnacles of the wall, and broke off the corners of the towers; for no body of men could be so strong as not to be overthrown to the last rank by the largeness of the stones." (*Wars*, Book III, Chapter 7, Section 23.) "Now, the stones that were cast, were of the weight of a talent . . ." (*Wars*, Book V, Chapter 6, Section 3). The "hailstones" represent the hail of stones cast upon the city by the Roman artillery.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 17

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Remember the Harlot is a figure of the “great city” (17:18; 11:8).
2. Note that the Harlot and the ten kings are enemies (17:16-17).
3. Is there any reason why we must identify the Harlot with the “Apostate Church” (ie. Roman Catholicism) instead of with unfaithful Jerusalem?
4. Go to the encyclopedia and make a list of the emperors of Rome, beginning with Augustus Caesar. Compare them with the ten kings of Chapter 17.

IX. THE GREAT HARLOT (Chapters 17-18)

Chapters seventeen and eighteen represent the awful extent of God’s judgment on Jerusalem, the great Harlot. Before developing the contents of these chapters, let us say a little about the identification of the “Harlot.”

First, she cannot be interpreted as being imperial Rome, for that is the Sea-Beast. The Harlot is pictured as sitting upon this Beast (17:3).

Second, many people think the Harlot is the Roman Catholic Church. This view was conceived in the minds of persecuted minority groups during the Protestant Reformation, and in many particulars is a valid application of the principles taught in the Revelation. Whenever God fearing people are forced to submit to teachings and religious

practices contrary to their understanding of the word of God, God wills that they remain steadfast, and even die for the faith. Thus, the persecuting Catholic Church was a "beast" of the same sort as imperial Rome. Hitler was also such a "beast," and there will no doubt be many others. But the primary interpretation of the Revelation points to Nero as the first "Beast." We follow the same principle of interpretation when we study the letters of Paul to the churches. These letters had primary applications to problems then troubling the churches. But the principles which Paul taught in those letters find valid applications to our problems today. In the same way, the Revelation never ceases to be relevant to present-day Christianity.

The interpretation which sees Catholicism as the primary application of these symbols appears valid only if one sees the Revelation as a continuous history of Christianity from Pentecost till the end of time. The problem with this is that one is always prone to interpret the symbols in the "light" of his own experiences and to place the "end time" in his own generation. It always seems that "things have never been worse than they are now!"

Third, the "Harlot" is the "great city" (17:18). Jerusalem is called "the great city" (11:8). She is called "Egypt and Sodom" (11:8). Since she is pictured in the Old Testament as a harlot, it is natural to see her described here as "Babylon the great," the "harlot." See the notes on Revelation 18:16. Israel's spiritual whoredom was vividly pictured by Hosea the prophet. Not only so but Jerusalem was held guilty of "all the righteous blood" of God's prophets from the beginning (Matthew 23:34-37). She is seen in the Revelation as "drunken with the blood of the saints" (17:6).

I consider, therefore, that it is in perfect harmony with the Revelation to see Jerusalem as the "Harlot". Her destruction was an important event, being foretold by Daniel, Christ, and many other prophets of God.

Verse 1 — *And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters; Verse 2* — *with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication.*

Jerusalem is the Harlot. Her fornication is spiritual in nature. She was unfaithful to God in her pursuit of material gain, in her hypocrisy (cf. Matthew 23:1-38), and her hardness of heart.

Just as the city of Tyre played “the harlot with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth” (Isaiah 23:17, 18), so Jerusalem is pictured as playing “the harlot” and lavishing her “harlotries on any passerby” (Ezekiel 16:15). The idea is *commerce with other kingdoms*, dependence upon other kingdoms rather than upon God (cf. Hosea 8:9-10, “Hire lovers . . . hire allies.”) It does not mean that Jerusalem had *military dominance* over the other kingdoms. It was rather a *commercial dependence*. This “harlotry” was of a strange sort. Usually, a harlot would be paid for her services, but Jerusalem *paid her* lovers! (cf. Ezekiel 16:31-34). Thus, in the Revelation, “the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth *waxed rich by the power of her wantonness*” (18:3; see also 18:11-19).

Verse 3 — *And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.*

The scarlet Beast is the Sea-Beast of Chapter 13. Scarlet is the color of the second horse (6:3-4) and of the Dragon (12:3), and represents bloodshed and persecution. See Chapter 17:10-11 for an explanation of the “horns” and “heads.”

Verse 4 – And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication,

The Harlot is bedecked in bright clothing. "Purple" shows her royal status, "scarlet" indicates her harlotry and bloodthirstiness, the gold and jewels show her wealth. Her golden cup overflows with evil.

The picture of the Harlot drinking from a golden cup is based upon the story of Belshazzar, the last king of ancient Babylon, who, with his lords, wives and concubines, drank wine from golden vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple of God (Daniel 5:1-4). While Belshazzar, in a drunken feast, was defiling the holy vessels which had been dedicated to the worship of the true God, the Medo-Persian army was bringing the Babylonian empire to its sudden and complete destruction. The Revelation portrays the Jerusalem of John's day in the same way. She was like a drunken harlot, defiling the temple of God which was within her walls. Pretending to honor God, she dishonored him through her many spiritual adulteries.

Verse 5 – and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

"Babylon the great" is her name. Her children are harlots like her (cf. Hosea 4:13).

Verse 6 – And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.

Jerusalem was guilty of the blood of all of God's prophets, including the Son of God. This blood would be required of her (Matthew 23:35-38).

Verse 7 — *And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and the ten horns. Verse 8 — The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come.*

The Beast “was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition.” This appears to be a parody of Revelation 1:8, where God says he is the one “who is and who was and who is to come.” The Roman emperor claimed to be a god, forcing men to worship him. To say that the Beast “was, and is not” is perhaps a reference to the death of Nero and his supposed “resurrection” (see notes on 13:3). The death of the persecuting emperor Nero in A. D. 68 would not mean the end of persecution. The Beast would arise again and kill, but would ultimately be destroyed.

Many men, however, would follow after the Beast and worship it because of its power (13:3, 4).

Verse 9 — *Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth:*

The seven heads of the Sea-Beast are seven “hills.” We have seen that mountains or hills represent kings and kingdoms. Compare Isaiah 2:2 where the kingdom of God is to be exalted above the kingdoms of men. Revelation 17:10 states that the seven hills are “seven kings.” Many suppose that the “seven hills” refer to the seven literal hills upon which the city of Rome was built. If it were not stated that the “hills” are “kings” this explanation would appear more acceptable.

Again, observe that the Harlot is not the Beast, for she is seated on the Beast. The city of Rome, however, is a part of the Beast. The seven kings are kings of Rome. In Revelation 17:16 we observe that the Beast hates the woman and makes her desolate. This desolation was prophesied both by Daniel (9:26-27) and by Christ (Luke 21:20-24).

Verse 10 — and they are seven kings; the five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while. Verse 11 — And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition. Verse 12 — And the ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. Verse 13 — These have one mind, and they give their power and authority unto the beast.

The “seven hills” are seven kings. The “ten horns” are ten kings who receive royal power “with the beast.”

Some regard the “horns” as being subject kingdoms within the Roman empire. If this is the case then we have these kingdoms joining with Rome in the destruction of the Harlot.

It appears more reasonable to me, however, to regard the “ten horns” as being the *total* of the Roman rulers under consideration, while the “seven heads” would be *superlative horns*, or horns which had actually gained imperial power. As we shall see, following this interpretation, not all of the horns were so elevated. That is why the “horns” as a group are seen to be lower than the “heads.” Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the statue and Daniel’s vision of the four beasts (Daniel 2 and 7) show clearly that the Roman kingdom would have ten kings during the beginning period of the church, God’s kingdom. The ten toes of the statue (Daniel 2:41-44) and the ten horns of the

fourth beast (Daniel 7:7, 23, 24) correspond to John's vision of the Sea-Beast. They are the Roman kings whose combined reigns cover the beginning period of the church.

Which kings are these? Many commentators begin the list of emperors with Julius, the first "Caesar." Julius did ring down the curtain on the Republic and may well have been the first imperial ruler. It is from him that the title "Caesar" derives. While it may be true that he should be regarded as the first of the heads and horns, two considerations cause me to begin my list with his successor, Augustus. First, Julius' reign ended in 30 B. C. He is therefore outside the historical context of Christianity's beginnings. Second, to shift the succession of ten rulers, in order to begin with Julius, makes it difficult to harmonize verses 10 and 11 with these kings. But if we start with Augustus it all falls into place with no "forcing" of the passage.

The following list of rulers, beginning with Augustus Caesar, will prove helpful here.

"Five have fallen."

1. Augustus, B. C. 30 to A. D. 14
2. Tiberius, A. D. 14 to 37
3. Caligula, A. D. 37 to 41
4. Claudius, A. D. 41 to 54
5. Nero, A. D. 54 to 68
 - 1) Galba 2) Otho 3) Vitellius

"One is."

6. Vespasian, A. D. 69 to 79

"The other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a little while."

7. Titus, A. D. 79 to 81

"And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven."

8. Domitian, A. D. 81 to 96.

Compare the above list as you read verses ten and eleven. Five of these kings had already fallen at the time of

the writing. Nero was the fifth and had already committed suicide. A period of transition followed, during which three generals (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) successively seized the throne, but without ever exercising imperial authority. Then Vespasian, whose armies were already besieging Jerusalem, was proclaimed emperor. He went to Rome to begin his reign and his son Titus became the head of Rome's armies in Palestine. According to verse 10, John wrote the Revelation in Vespasian's reign, either shortly before Jerusalem fell, or soon afterward.

The "beast that was and is not" is said to be "an eighth" king (vs. 11). In a veiled allusion to Nero's death and the legend of his "resurrection" (see the notes on 13:3), John reveals that another king would be added to the seven who were called "heads." This would be Domitian, the next king in line. Domitian was such a cruel emperor in his persecution of Christians that he is said to be "of the seven." He was a second Nero, a "resurrected" Nero. Remember that the body of Nero was never found and that many people thought Nero was going to return. In this sense he did "return" in the person of Domitian. In the same way, John the Baptist conducted himself "in the spirit and power" of Elijah (Luke 1:17), so that Jesus could say, "He is Elijah" (Matthew 11:14; 17:12-13). Domitian would be the same kind of bestial persecutor of Christians that Nero was.

Verse 14 — These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they also shall overcome that are with him, called and chosen and faithful.

The power of these Roman rulers would be directed against the Lamb, but he and his followers would conquer them, for he is King of kings. This recalls the vision of Daniel 2:44-45 where the "little stone" struck the great statue on its feet of iron and clay, breaking them into pieces. The "little stone" is Christ and his kingdom.

Verse 15 – *And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*

“The waters” represent the multitudes of people inhabiting the earth. This is the usual meaning of “many waters” and “seas” (17:1; 16:1; 13:1). The Harlot (17:1) is pictured as seated upon these “waters,” indicating her influence on the populations of the earth.

Verse 16 – *And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and shall burn her utterly with fire.*

The Roman kings (the ten horns) and the empire (the Beast) turn against the Harlot and strip her naked, utterly destroying her. They are here represented as the Harlot’s former “lovers” who now hold her in revulsion.

Ezekiel (Chapter 16) presents a sad story similar to this and is possibly the basis for John’s symbolism. According to the story, God found Jerusalem as a newborn baby girl, abandoned by her parents, naked and unwashed. God bathed her, took care of her and watched her grow into a beautiful young woman. He “fell in love” with her and took her for his bride. He clothed her with fine linen and silk, gold rings and beautiful ornaments. Because of God’s love for her, she became renowned among the nations. But she became vain, trusting in her beauty, and began to play the harlot with “every passerby.” She took no hire for her favors, but rather she paid her lovers well, giving them the gold and silver which God, her rightful “husband,” had given to her. But her adulteries were well-known to God who promised to “judge” her as “women who break wedlock” (Ezekiel 16:38). “And I will give you into the hand of your lovers, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places; they

shall strip you of your clothes and take your fair jewels, and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a host against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords" (Ezekiel 16:39-40).

Verse 17 – For God did put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God should be accomplished.

This destruction of Jerusalem, the Harlot, was in fulfillment of the will of God. Daniel spoke of it (Daniel 9:27), Jesus prophesied it (Matthew 24; Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24), and John describes it in the Revelation.

Verse 18 – And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

The woman is the great city, Jerusalem. See the introductory notes to chapter seventeen. Her dominion over the kings of the earth was one of commerce rather than of military might, as the power of a harlot over her lovers.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 18 [18:1-3]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Read Ezekiel 16 and note how Jerusalem is pictured as God's bride. See how she became a harlot. Compare this picture with that of Revelation 18.
2. The "great Harlot's" commerce was spiritual. Remember this as you study Chapter 18.
3. Compare again 18:24 with Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 23:34-39 concerning Jerusalem.

Verse 1 – After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was lightened with his glory. Verse 2 – And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird. Verse 3 – For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness.

A mighty angel proclaims with a powerful voice that Babylon the Great, the Harlot, is fallen. Her desolation was great. This symbol of "Babylon's" fall is based upon the language of Isaiah and Jeremiah who graphically described how the literal city of Babylon would become a deserted

place where wild beasts and unclean birds would live instead of people (cf. Isaiah 21:9; 13:20-22; Jeremiah 50:1-3, 39). "Therefore wild beasts shall dwell in her; she shall be peopled no more for ever, nor inhabited for all generations" (Jeremiah 50:39). This prophecy literally came true, and for many hundreds of years Babylon was deserted. The great city became just a sand hill which even the bedouins superstitiously avoided as recently as the 19th century. (cf. *Barnes Notes* and *The Biblical Illustrator*, on Isaiah 13:20).

Jeremiah applied the same kind of language to Jerusalem: "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant" (Jeremiah 9:11). This literally came to pass in 586 B. C. when Nebuchadnezzar's hosts overran Judah (Jeremiah 39). Later, Daniel forecast another desolation of the city of Jerusalem (Daniel 9:26-27), which came to pass in A. D. 70. (See Matthew 24:15-21; Mark 13:14-19; Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24).

Verse 4 — And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues: Verse 5 — for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Verse 6 — Render unto her even as she rendered, and double unto her the double according to her works: in the cup which she mingled, mingle unto her double. Verse 7 — How much soever she glorified herself, and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning. Verse 8 — Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judged her.

Jeremiah warned the Jews in exile: "Flee from the midst of Babylon, let every man save his life! Be not cut off

in her punishment, for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance . . . The nations drank of her wine, therefore the nations went mad . . ." (Jeremiah 51:6-7). The great city had become proud and vain and would be brought low.

So it was with Jerusalem, spiritual "Babylon." God brought her low. Although she sat as a queen and did not regret being far from God, her destruction came swiftly as "in one day." There would be "death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire." Thus the Harlot, the unfaithful city, literally fell.

Verse 9 – And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning, Verse 10 – standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

The "kings of the earth," the "mountains" of 16:20, who ordinarily would have come to the aid of the besieged city of Jerusalem, stand "afar off." They are not willing to share in her destruction. The "Beast," imperial Rome, is far too strong.

Verse 11 – And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more; Verse 12 – merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet; and all thyine wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble; Verse 13 – and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep; and merchandise of horses and chariots and slaves; and souls of men. Verse 14 – And the fruits which thy soul lusted after are gone from thee, and all things that were dainty and sumptuous are perished from thee, and

men shall find them no more at all. Verse 15 — The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning; Verse 16 — saying, Woe, woe, the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl! Verse 17 — for in one hour so great riches is made desolate. And every shipmaster, and every one that saileth any whither, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off, Verse 18 — and cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like the great city? Verse 19 — And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, wherein all that had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

The “merchants” (verse 11) and the “sailors” (verse 17) also stand “afar off.” They mourn for the great city but do nothing to help her. They regret that their source of revenue is cut off. These “merchants” are the “lovers” of the harlot city Jerusalem (see notes on 17:16). Their “commerce” is to be understood in a spiritual sense, for “human souls” were actually Jerusalem’s stock in trade. As Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: “Woe unto you . . . for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).

Verse 20 — Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye saints, and ye apostles, and ye prophets; for God hath judged your judgment on her.

God’s faithful people should not look upon Jerusalem’s fall as the ultimate tragedy. As terrible as it was, this catastrophe was a part of God’s judgment on the wicked. When the wicked are judged the righteous are exalted.

Verse 21 — And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all. Verse 22 — And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in thee; and the voice of a mill shall be heard no more at all in thee; Verse 23 — and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the princes of the earth; for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived. Verse 24 — And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth.

The great stone cast into the sea represents the violent downfall of Jerusalem. To be thrown into “the sea” means to be dispersed among the nations, for the “sea” represents the earth’s multitudes (17:15). Jerusalem was deserted. There was no more the sound of rejoicing in her streets. The artisans were gone. Her “light” was put out. What greater sign of desolation than the picture of a silent darkened city? The religion of this city is called “sorcery” for it was but a travesty of the truth.

As Jesus had foretold, the city would be judged guilty of “all the righteous blood shed on the earth” from Abel onward (Matthew 23:35-37; Luke 13:33-35).

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 19 [19:1-3]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Chapter 18 saw the destruction of the Harlot (unfaithful Jerusalem). Chapter 19 witnesses the destruction of the Sea-Beast (Rome) and of the False Prophet.

2. Note in particular the appearance of the Lamb's Bride. She stands in contrast to the unfaithful Harlot. The Bride is the "New Jerusalem" of Revelation 21:2, the church (Ephesians 5:23-32; Galatians 4:23-31).

3. Remember that there are two feasts in Revelation 19. The Lamb's wedding supper and the "supper of the great God." What significance do you see in these two suppers?

X. THE TWO SUPPERS (Chapter 19)

A. THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB (19:1-10)

Verse 1 — After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah; Salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God: Verse 2 — for true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great harlot, her that corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. Verse 3 — And a second time they say, Hallelujah. And her smoke goeth up for ever and ever.

A great heavenly multitude raises a mighty voice of praise at the justice of God's judgments. God hates sin and will punish the sinner, and God's children should rejoice at the overthrow of man's sinful designs.

The punishment of the Harlot would never end. "Her smoke goeth up for ever and ever." Those who see a prospering earthly Jerusalem as the fulfillment of God's work should remember that earthly Jerusalem's punishment was everlasting. The Harlot is no longer considered to be the bride of Jehovah. The "new Jerusalem" is a spiritual city, and as such is the Bride of the Lamb. The "Harlot," the faithful city which went wrong (Isaiah 1:21), no longer has a place in God's family.

Verse 4 — And the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God that sitteth on the throne, saying, Amen; Hallelujah. Verse 5 — And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, Give praise to our God, all ye his servants ye that fear him, the small and the great.

The twenty-four elders (representing the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles) and the four living creatures (representing God's physical, earthly creation) fall down and worship God. "So be it, praise Jehovah!" is their cry. At the same time a voice from the throne of God calls for God's servants to praise God.

Verse 6 — And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Verse 7 — Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. Verse 8 — And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Following the call to praise God, a mighty, swelling voice of praise seems to rise, like the sound of many waters and mighty peals of thunder. God's people scattered among the nations, rise in joy and exultation, with one voice shouting, "Praise Jehovah!"

"The marriage of the Lamb has come." The "Bride" of Christ is the church (Ephesians 5:25-32). She is exalted in contrast to the fallen "Harlot," clothed with "fine linen, bright and pure." The "fine linen" is symbolic of "the righteous acts of the saints" and is in contrast to the unrighteousness which was rampant in old Jerusalem.

Verse 9 — And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are true words of God.

Those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and who accept, are called "happy." This "beatitude" reminds us of the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-10). In this parable a king invited people to a marriage feast for his son, but they made light of the invitation (cf. Matthew 23:37) and killed the king's messengers. The king then "sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city" (Matthew 22:7), but those who accepted the invitation entered the wedding hall. This actually happened to the city of Jerusalem. For this reason the city was cast down. Had the Jews accepted the king's invitation their city would have been spared.

Verse 9 contains the fourth of the seven "Beatitudes" of the book of Revelation. (See the note on 1:3).

Verse 10 — And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Angels are "ministering spirits" (Hebrews 1:14), and are thus "fellow-servants" of those who "hold the

testimony of Jesus.” This being true, men are not to worship angels. God alone may be worshipped by men. They are in error who offer prayers to angels or to departed Christians, however faithful these may have been. “Worship God!”

True prophets of God are busy testifying of Jesus. This “testimony” is the very heart or “spirit” of true prophetism. Those who deny Jesus or who persuade men to worship anyone but God are, therefore, not true prophets.

B. THE SUPPER OF THE GREAT GOD (19:11-21)

Verse 11 – And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. Verse 12 – And his eyes are a flame of fire, upon his head are many diadems; and he hath a name written which no one knoweth but he himself. Verse 13 – And he is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood: and his name is called The Word of God. Verse 14 – And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure.

The heavens open and John sees a rider astride a white horse. White is the symbol of purity and victory. The rider is called Faithful and True and his judgment is pronounced in righteousness. His eyes are like flames of fire, looking into the hearts of men. This is Christ whom John first saw at the beginning of the Revelation (1:12-16). Many crowns of victory are on his head. The name written on him is known only to himself. This name is “The Word of God” and recalls the fact that Jesus is the *LOGOS*, the Word (John 1:1). Since he is the origin of the word, and since he is infinite, as God, it is obvious that only he could know the word in an absolute sense.

The robe in which Christ is clad was “dipped in blood” – his own. He is the Lamb “that was slain from the

foundation of the world" (13:8). Pictured at the beginning of the Revelation as a Lamb "standing, as though it had been slain" (5:6), he is now seen as the invincible warrior at the head of heaven's mighty armies. He had appeared to be the object of pity but now he is the victor.

The armies of heaven are also clad in "fine linen, white and pure." Righteousness is their breastplate; the truth is their girdle, as they follow in the steps of their victorious leader.

Verse 15 — And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God, the Almighty. Verse 16 — And he hath on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

The "sharp sword" comes out of the mouth of Christ, and can only be the word of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:17). This is the weapon with which the Lord of lords and King of kings smites the nations.

Note that the "Harlot" has already been judged. Now it is the "nations" who are smitten with the sword of the Word. The nations had mercilessly trodden under foot the faithless city. Although they had accomplished God's purpose in so doing, their bloodthirstiness would in turn bring on their own destruction.

Verse 17 — And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven, Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God; Verse 18 — that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great. Verse 19 — And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army.

Verse 20 — And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast and them that worshipped his image: they two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone: Verse 21 — and the rest were killed with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, even the sword which came forth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The “great supper of God” herein described is in contrast to the “marriage supper of the Lamb.” The “marriage supper” pictures Christ and the church united forever in love and happiness. The other supper shows the utter destruction of those who would harm the church.

Birds of prey always gather to consume the decaying carcass. So it is that Christ, the rider of the white horse, would bring to ruin the Roman imperial Beast and all those who aided it in the persecution of God’s people. The Satan-inspired False Prophet shares the Beast’s downfall. The “False Prophet” is the Earth-Beast of 13:11, and represents false prophetism and not any particular individual. The “lake of fire and brimstone” into which the Beast and the False Prophet are thrown reminds us of the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is symbolic of the utter defeat of the enemies of God’s people.

The weaponry which the Lamb uses is spiritual in nature. The “sword” issued from his mouth and is the “word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10:4-5). The Roman persecutors and the false prophets would all be defeated, and the means of their defeat would be the powerful word of God.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 20

[20:1-3]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Go back and review the fifth seal (6:9-11). The martyrs were under the altar but now are on thrones and reigning. Should we interpret the thrones literally when it is obvious that the altar is symbolical?

2. Consider the symbolic value of the various numbers in the Revelation. Should the number 1,000 be interpreted literally as a period of time or symbolically as a quality of time?

3. Study the judgment scene of Chapter 20 in contrast to the scene in which the martyrs are elevated to thrones.

XI. THE FINAL VICTORY (20:1-15)

A. REIGNING WITH CHRIST (20:1-6)

Verse 1 – And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. Verse 2 – And he laid hold on the dragon the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, Verse 3 – and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.

This vision is symbolic of the defeat of Satan. He is pictured as "bound" and cast into the bottomless pit. It is obvious that no literal binding with chains is here envisioned. But Satan's *power* would be diminished through the overwhelming victory of Christ. Remember that it is the Word of God who captured the Beast and the False Prophet (19:20-21). It is also the Word who binds Satan for a thousand years (20:3). "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . ." (Hebrews 4:12). This word "is not bound" (II Timothy 2:9), but when it is preached and taught it prevails over evil and effectively binds the Devil. His power is greatly reduced in the lives of God's people. In this sense he is "bound."

He is bound for "a thousand years," the period of time during which God's suffering people would "reign" (20:4). The thousand years must not be taken literally. They are symbolic of infinity. The Beast and the False Prophet trampled Jerusalem under foot for forty-two months, but Satan would be bound for a thousand years. The saints were persecuted for a few years; they would reign for a thousand years. The same thought is expressed in nonsymbolic language by the apostle Paul: "We are children of God . . . provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:17, 18, RSV).

The "thousand years" must not be thought of in terms of length of time, any more than the 144,000 (7:4) must be viewed as so many people. Both are symbolic of *quality* and not of *quantity*. Just as "seven" is symbolic of completeness, "a thousand" signifies the ultimate victory. The suffering church of Smyrna was to have tribulation for "ten days" (2:10). Her victory would be for "a thousand years." A thousand is a multiple of ten, indicating the symbolic character of the number.

Following the thousand years, Satan would be released for a little while. This foretold a period of time during which Satan would again deceive the nations. The light of the Gospel would grow dim and Satan's power would increase.

Verse 4 — And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. Verse 5 — The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection. Verse 6 — Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

These who are seated on thrones and to whom judgment was committed are quite likely the apostles of Christ. Jesus had told them that "in the regeneration" they would sit on twelve thrones, "judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28). The "regeneration" apparently refers to the period of time during which sinners would be regenerated or "born again." It is during this Christian age that Christ sits on his throne and reigns as King, and it is now that the apostles, through their preaching, judge Israel.

John also saw the "souls" of the beheaded martyrs and of those who had faithfully refused to worship the Roman emperor (20:4). They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years, the same period during which Satan was bound. They had been "under the altar," (6:9) signifying apparent defeat, as the world saw it. But, when God's word triumphed they were elevated to a reigning position on "thrones" and Satan was "bound." They were

“under the altar” for only a short time, whereas they reign for a thousand years! This can not be seen as a literal reign on the earth. The altar is symbolic, so is the throne. These are signs of defeat and ultimate victory. The meaning is simply that while Christians seemed to lose many battles they would ultimately win the war!

This “reign” with Christ is spoken of as “the first resurrection” (20:4). They “came to life” (RSV). This resurrection is symbolic, not literal, and refers only to those who were “under the altar.” It does not refer to a bodily resurrection at all. When the cause for which the martyrs gave their lives became triumphant they shared in the triumph in a spiritual sense.

The “rest of the dead” (verse 5) probably refers primarily to those who had yielded to the demands of the Roman emperor and who had worshipped him. They, of course, would not share in the victory of Christ. They are not “blessed and holy” (verse 6). Their destiny is the “second death,” everlasting separation from God. Contrariwise, the “blessed and holy” ones are “priests” of God and of Christ and “reign with him a thousand years.”

The first part of verse 6 is the fifth of the seven “beatitudes” of Revelation. (See the note on 1:3).

B. SATAN CAST INTO HADES (20:7-10)

Verse 7 — And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, Verse 8 — and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. Verse 9 — And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them. Verse 10 — And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Although the church would be victorious over the Roman persecuting powers and the false prophetism which attempted to cause the church to lapse into idolatry, the struggle was far from over. Satan was not yet destroyed, and it was he who had inspired the "Beast" and the "False Prophet." Satan would again attempt to destroy the church. He would gather the spiritual enemies of God's people against them in battle array and try to overwhelm them. These spiritual hosts are called "Gog and Magog" (verse 8), in a reference to the historic enemies of Israel (Ezekiel 38:1, ff). After the Restoration of Israel from the Babylonian Exile, various nations continued to afflict the Jews. These were spoken of as "Gog, of the land of Magog." Although Gog would attempt to overrun the restored Jewish exiles, he would not be successful, for Jehovah would "restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel" (Ezekiel 39:25). This would happen when God would "pour out of my Spirit upon the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 39:29). This "outpouring" of the Spirit came to pass on Pentecost following the ascension of Christ (Acts 2:1-4, 15:21). Joel had prophesied concerning this same event (Joel 2:28). "Gog, of the land of Magog" met his defeat at the hands of Jesus Christ, according to Ezekiel's prophecy. This is also the message of the Revelation. Heathenism would not smother and defeat the church of Christ.

Just as the exiles, after their restoration to their own land, had to face the continuing resistance of their hereditary enemies, so the Christians who emerged victoriously from the struggle against the imperial persecutors would face the continuing resistance of Satan. So it must be as long as the world stands. But though Satan's hosts be "as the sand of the sea" they will be defeated by God. The Devil, the great deceiver, will be thrown into the "lake of fire and brimstone," sharing the fate of the Beast and the False Prophet. (See notes on 19:20).

C. FINAL JUDGMENT (20:11-15)

Verse 11 – And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. Verse 12 – And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. Verse 13 – And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. Verse 14 – And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, even the lake of fire. Verse 15 – And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Immediately following the terrible picture of the destruction of the Devil, John sees a vision of God seated on a great white throne. The whiteness of this throne represents the holiness of God and the righteousness of his verdict. The “earth and the Heaven” flee from the one on the throne, signifying the awesome aspect of this scene.

The “dead, the great and the small” appear to be “the rest of the dead” mentioned in 20:5. That is, those who had worshipped the Beast and his image. These had no share in “the first resurrection” (verse 5), but are instead summoned before the awesome judgment throne of the Almighty where their evil deeds confront and condemn them.

The import of the “great white throne” vision is the condemnation of the wicked. Chapter 20 presents one of the vivid contrasts of the Revelation. On the one hand the righteous are pictured as “reigning.” On the other hand the wicked face the God they have rejected.

The "books" which were opened (verse 13) are thought by some to be the books of the Bible, since these books contain the word of God by which men are to be judged. Though the word of God is certainly the basis for God's judgment, it appears, however, from the context that these "books" are simply the record of what the dead have done. Just as the deeds of the righteous dead "follow them" (14:13), so do the deeds of the unrighteous rise up to confront and condemn them.

"Death and Hades," heretofore seen hard at work (6:7-8) harvesting the victims of the riders of the red horse and black horse, are now cast into the lake of fire. God's people will no longer be subject to them. Death no longer has any power and Hades, the abode of the dead, is no more. Remember that Death and Hades are here personified and are portrayed as being allies of the Beast and the False Prophet. Throughout the Bible both Death and Hades bear unfavorable connotations. They are set in opposition to "life" and eternal happiness. This vision signifies the *down-fall* of the forces of evil and is based upon the picture of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The "other book" which opened at this judgment scene is "the book of life" (verse 12). In order to avoid the destruction which befell the Beast and the False Prophet (19:20), Gog and Magog (20:9), the Devil (20:10), and Death and Hades (20:14), one must have his name written in this book (20:15). Those who do not have their name written in this record are "cast into the lake of fire."

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 21

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Study the picture of New Jerusalem as the very opposite of the Harlot, Old Jerusalem. The Harlot was corrupt in all her ways; the Bride of Christ, the church, is pure.

2. Consider New Jerusalem first as the triumphant church. Then consider her as the glorified church, in Heaven.

XII. NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

A. THE NEW JERUSALEM (21:1 - 22:5)

Many prophecies of Scripture have a dual application. For example, the prophecy of Ezekiel 37 foretells the restoration of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as a single kingdom (Ezekiel 37:21-23). This was literally fulfilled in the Restoration led by Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1-2) and Nehemiah. The entire land area formerly occupied by the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel was under one united Jewish government by the time of Judas Macabaeus (c. 167 B.C.). But this amazing prophecy was to have another fulfillment, one of a spiritual nature. This interpretation is not forced upon the passage, for Ezekiel himself says that "My servant David shall be king" over this united kingdom (Ezekiel 37:24). This prophecy thus finds its ultimate

fulfillment in the coming of Jesus Christ, who is now sitting on "the throne of David," ruling over the kingdom of heaven.

In the same way, Revelation 21 and 22 constitute prophecy with a dual fulfillment. *First*, they are a picture of the church as it has passed victoriously through the great tribulation of the destruction of Jerusalem, showing the "New Jerusalem" in contrast to the old city, the "Harlot." The "new city" is holy, the old city is corrupt. *Second*, these chapters seem to be a picture of the eternal felicity of the church in heaven, glorified in the presence of the Father and the Lamb (II Peter 1:10-11).

Verse 1 — And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more.

The expression "new heaven and a new earth" is used in the Bible of both the Christian age and the eternal phase of the kingdom after the final destruction of the physical earth. While Peter (II Peter 3:12-14) uses the expression to refer to the period following the earth's destruction, it seems clear that Isaiah in a highly symbolic passage, describes the Messianic period (Isaiah 65:17-25). That Isaiah was speaking of the Christian age is apparent when one compares this passage with Isaiah 11:1-10. Paul refers to this latter passage in Acts 13:23 and Romans 15:12, stating that the first coming of Christ fulfilled this prophecy. The appearance of the Messiah heralded a new era of spiritual peace and reconciliation with God. This new era was described by Isaiah in picture form which must not be understood literally. The Christian world was to be, and is, a "new heaven and a new earth."

When the Revelation uses the term in a symbolic setting it may so be understood, for with the passing of old Jerusalem a new era commenced. The church was liberated, as it were, from the bonds and restraints of Judaism. The

“earth,” symbolic of the worldly persecuting powers, and the “sea,” signifying the heathen nations (17:15), were of the past. The church had triumphed over them.

Verse 2 – And I saw the holy city new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

The “holy city” is the church, the “Bride” of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-32). She is the “new Jerusalem” in contrast to the “old” city, the Harlot. She is beautifully adorned for her husband. This adornment is described in Revelation 21:10-21.

The Bride is pictured “coming down out of heaven” to meet her husband. The fact that she “comes down” from heaven shows this to be symbolic, for when Christ comes “we shall be caught up together . . . in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thessalonians 4:17). The Revelation presents a submissive Bride stepping down from her place of honor and exaltation as she approaches her husband. To be *cast down* from “heaven” indicates defeat, but to “come down” from heaven means voluntary submission.

Verse 3 – And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: Verse 4 – and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away. Verse 5 – And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he saith, Write: for these words are faithful and true.

As we view the triumphant Bride of Christ, in her holiness, a voice from heaven affirms God’s approval of her and his promise to be with her. God would do for her what

he had at one time done for old Jerusalem when he chose her in the beginning (Ezekiel 16:9-14). He would wipe the tears from the eyes of his persecuted people. Mourning, pain, and death would be things of the past.

Verse 6 — And he said unto me, They are come to pass. I am Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. Verse 7 — He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. Verse 8 — But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.

God again speaks and promises “water without price” to the thirsty. Those who overcome may freely drink, for this is their heritage (Romans 8:17-18). They are sons of God.

Those who, through cowardice, broke faith with Christ and polluted themselves in spiritual fornication at the feet of Caesar’s image, became as one with the persecuting murderers of the faithful. As were the sorcerers who deceived them, they became liars, affirming that Caesar was God. Such people have no share in the “holy city.” They must share the destiny of the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Devil, eternal separation from God.

Verse 9 — And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Verse 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, Verse 11 — having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it

were a jasper stone, clear as crystal: Verse 12 — having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: Verse 13 — on the east were three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. Verse 14 — And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

One of the seven angels shows John the symbolic picture of the triumphant church of Christ. Her glory is like that of a rare jewel for she is of great price before God. A great high wall surrounds her, for she is impregnable. No enemy can conquer her. Jesus had said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). She has twelve gates, three on each side, for God's people come "from the east and west, and from the north and south, and . . . sit down in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29). The city's wall has twelve foundations, representing the teaching of the twelve apostles of Christ (Ephesians 2:20).

Verse 15 — And he that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. Verse 16 — And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal. Verse 17 — And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. Verse 18 — And the building of the wall thereof was jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto pure glass. Verse 19 — The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; Verse 20 — the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth,

sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoptase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. Verse 21 — And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

In Revelation 11:1-2, the temple, the altar, and the worshippers were measured, but the old city was left unmeasured. Now we see the new Jerusalem measured by the angel, for she is the holy people of God and is thus shown to be approved by him.

The city is tremendous, almost fifteen hundred miles around it, as we compute the 12,000 furlongs, or stadia. This should not, however, be taken as a literal measurement. As with most of the other numbers, this one should be taken of *quality* not of *quantity*. "One thousand", here as in the "thousand years" (20:4), means much the same as the number "seven", representing completeness or perfection. "Twelve" thousand recalls the number of God's people as in 7:4ff.

Note that the city is shaped as a cube, "The length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal" (verse 16). There is nothing irregular in it, all is in perfect proportion.

The walls of the city are a hundred and forty-four cubits high. Again the measure is symbolic: twelve times twelve, indicating the strength and impregnability of God's holy city. The use of the number twelve to measure the wall indicates that this city is not built of ordinary material, but of God's children, "living stones" (I Peter 2:5). This is another indication that this New Jerusalem is a picture of the Lord's Church.

The city and its wall are of precious metal and jewels. The foundations are adorned with jewels, the twelve gates are made of pearls, and the street is pure gold. These materials must be understood as symbolic of spiritual attributes, for we would certainly be in error to think that

God places a high value on such materials.

Verse 22 — And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb are the temple thereof. Verse 23 — And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. Verse 24 — And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it. Verse 25 — And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there): Verse 26 — and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it: Verse 27 — and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.

There is no material temple in God's new Jerusalem, for the Father and Christ are the temple. God's people are pictured as being "in the temple" worshipping God.

There is no longer a need for "sun or moon," for God and the Lamb are the "light" and "lamp" of his people. Remember that the "sun" and "moon" are symbolic of the Jewish spiritual leaders (cf. notes on 6:12-17). With the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish economy, these leaders would no longer be there. The light of God's people is God himself. He guides us through his inspired word. When men attempt to lead in other directions they cease to follow God's light.

The light which God and the Lamb shed through the church is that which guides the nations and the kings of the earth into the people of God. It is when sinners are enlightened by the gospel of Christ that they lay down at Christ's feet the glory and honor which they had previously enjoyed.

Whether we view the New Jerusalem as being the triumphant church as it came out of the period of Roman

persecution, or as the glorified church after the final judgment, nothing unclean can enter the New Jerusalem. Only those who are led by the light of God and the Lamb may enter. This would exclude from the city of God those Christians who worshipped the image of the emperor and those who "went along" in order to escape persecution.

A COMMENTARY ON REVELATION

CHAPTER 22 [22:1-5]

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU STUDY

1. Consider 22:1-5 as a part of the description of the New Jerusalem.

2. Pay close attention to the speaker in the Epilogue and Conclusion (22:6-21). It appears that the "He" of 22:6 refers to the "angel" of 21:9, 15 and 22:1. But the "I" of 22:7 seems to be the voice of the "Alpha and the Omega" of 22:12-13. In your view, does the principle speaker of 22:12-20 seem to be the Lord Jesus? If so, does this not identify him as being "the Alpha and the Omega?"

Verse 1 — And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, Verse 2 — in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Verse 3 — And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants shall serve him; Verse 4 — and they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads. Verse 5 — And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the

Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

These verses present a picture of peace and tranquility with God in the midst of his people. While most take this only as a picture of heaven, I see no reason not to apply it first to this present age.

The "New Jerusalem" is evidently the triumphant church, though it also pictures the glorified church in heaven. Probably a dual meaning is to be seen in these visions. Again, to view this in a literalistic way is to materialize heaven. I do not believe God intends to convey to us a materialistic hope.

The "water of life" is a blessing which may be enjoyed today by all who come to Jesus (John 4:10-15; 7:37-39). Thus the Spirit and the Bride (the church) invite the sinner to come and drink without price (22:17).

Only one "street" is mentioned in this city. This pictures the "highway" prophesied by Isaiah (35:8-10). It is the "Way" mentioned in the Acts (22:4; 16:17; 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:22), and preached by the apostles. Jesus is "the Way" (John 14:6), and there is no other (Acts 4:12).

Drawing its nourishment from the "river of the water of life" is the tree of life. There is only one tree, yet it is pictured as being on either side of the river (verse 2). Could this tree, like the vine (John 15:1), be symbolic of Christ? As the vine has branches which bear fruit, so does the tree bear twelve kinds of fruit. Remember that "twelve" is the symbolic number of God's people. This fruit is yielded regularly, each month (ie. twelve times a year). May we say that the fruit is multiplied by itself each year? So it must ever be! God's people must continually reproduce themselves.

The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Since there will be no unsaved or "unhealed" people in heaven, the vision must refer primarily to the here and now, for it is now that the nations must be healed.

There are no "accursed" in the church of God. As men view the church there are indeed hypocrites in it, but as God views her she is without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27). "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (II Timothy 2:19) and is not fooled by appearances.

In a spiritual way God and Christ are now in the midst of the church (Matthew 18:19-20). While we do not literally see God's face (verse 4) we do see him through the light of the Gospel. Paul explains how those under the Law of Moses were "veiled" and unable to see clearly (II Corinthians 3:14, 15). But now that the Law is removed, "we all, with unveiled face (behold) the glory of God" (II Corinthians 3:18, RSV). "God . . . has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6, RSV). It is also true that in heaven we shall "see him even as he is" (I John 3:2).

There is no more night, even here below, for God's faithful. They walk in the light of God and continue to "reign in life" through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).

B. EPILOGUE (22:6-17)

Verse 6 — And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass. Verse 7 — And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book. Verse 8 — And I John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that showed me these things. Verse 9 — And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of this book: worship God.

The heavenly messenger again emphasizes the urgent character of the Revelation. These things herein described would soon take place. The declaration, "And behold, I come quickly," appears to be from the Lord Jesus, himself, and not from the angel who was speaking to John. The statement is seen again in verses 12 and 20. The blessing pronounced in verse 7 is one of the seven "beatitudes" of the Revelation and is included in the first (see 1:3). Indeed it was urgent that these words of prophecy be "kept", for they would soon take place.

John would have worshipped the angel who spoke to him but the messenger would not accept it. "Worship God!" he said. So must we abstain from any form of idolatry and worship only God. No man and no creature is worthy of our adoration.

Angels are ministers of God (Hebrews 1:14). It is a wonderful thought that we who serve God on the earth are "fellow-servants" with these heavenly beings. One day we shall even be like them in heaven (Mark 12:24; Luke 20:35).

Verse 10 — And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. Verse 11 — He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that is holy, let him be made holy still. Verse 12 — Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is. Verse 13 — I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Verse 14 — Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Verse 15 — Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

To "seal up" the prophecy would have been to hide it from the churches, and this would have been contrary to its

announced purpose of revealing what would soon take place. This Revelation was to be delivered to the churches with all haste.

There would be little time for men to change their ways, so near at hand was "the time" of the prophecy's fulfillment. So, "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy" (RSV). Jesus would recompense each one for his deeds, good or bad. He would soon come to mete out the judgments and plagues contained in this book, judgments on the Harlot, the Beast, and the False Prophet, but blessings on those who remained faithful to God.

It appears that the speaker in verse 13 is the same as in verse 16. It is Jesus who says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." This being true, we must identify Jesus as being "the Lord God, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8). Jesus is further identified with Deity in John 1:1, 14.

The seventh "beatitude" of the Revelation is that those who "wash their robes" have the right to enter the city by the gates. They have nothing of which to be ashamed, for with much courage they have laid down their lives for the Christ. Their robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). On the other hand there are those who are denied permission to enter the city. "Dogs", a term of contempt, implying spiritual filthiness, describes the wicked who must remain outside. "Sorcerers" are deceivers, "fornicators" are those who defiled themselves in the worship of idols, including the image of the emperor. "Murderers" certainly include those who helped the Roman persecutors as they sought out the faithful. Those who love and practice "falsehood" would include those who, in order to escape persecution, claimed not to be Christians. The New Jerusalem was not for them.

Verse 16 – I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and

the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star. Verse 17 — And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.

It is Jesus who sent his angel. This statement identifies the speaker of this last paragraph as Jesus. The angel who spoke to John (22:8-9) may actually have pronounced the words, but their author was Jesus. Thus it would appear that the speech began in 22:6 and carries down at least through 22:16 and perhaps even through 22:20.

Jesus is the "root and offspring of David" who was prophesied by Isaiah 11:1-10. He is the "bright morning star" which heralds a new day with its splendor and promise. Peter compared the prophetic word to "a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your heart" (II Peter 1:19). The meaning is the same. Jesus is the bright "star" foretold by the prophets, and he is to the veiled prophecies what the bright morning star is to a lamp burning in a dark place.

The Holy Spirit and the church, speaking as one voice, say "come." This is the heavenly invitation to participate in the glorious victory of Christ. Those who respond are urged to continue the call and extend the invitation to others, that all the thirsty may come and freely drink the water of life.

C. CONCLUSION (22:18-21)

Verse 18 — I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: Verse 19 — and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.

The warning is twofold. We must not add to these prophetic words nor may we diminish from them. To "add to" these words means more than to append additional words to the book, while it would certainly include such. Rather it is to change the meaning of these words, to "stretch" the message to make it fit one's particular way of life so that one may appear to be approved when actually he is condemned. To one who thus "tampers with God's word" (II Corinthians 4:2, RSV) the various plagues of the Revelation will be added. To "take away from" these words is to attempt to diminish their impact. Many people have thus destroyed the effectiveness of God's word, rendering it a sterile literary "masterpiece," devoid of real spiritual power. For them there will be no share in the tree of life and in the holy city. It goes without saying that what is here written concerning the Revelation also applies with equal force to the rest of God's word.

Verse 20 — He who testifieth these things saith, Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus. Verse 21 — The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen.

"He" refers to Jesus, the speaker in 22:16. The final assurance of his imminent coming reminds the readers of the urgency of the message contained in the Revelation. The "coming" to which he refers may be his spiritual "coming" in the events predicted in the book of Revelation. No doubt it must also be taken of his "second" coming in glory at the end of the world (Hebrews 9:27, 28). To this announcement John responds immediately with a hearty "Amen!" So should all Christians welcome the appearance of the Son of God, not with fear or foreboding, but with joy and peace. Verse 21 is from the pen of John the Apostle as a personal greeting and word of well-wishing to God's children.