



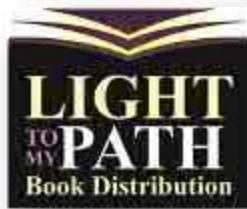
F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

# REVELATION

A Devotional Look at  
John's Vision of Future  
Events as Recorded in  
the Book of Revelation

# **Revelation**

*The Vision of the Apostle John  
On the Island of Patmos*



**F. Wayne MacLeod**

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## **Revelation**

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## Table of Contents

Preface .....	1
1 A Revelation of Jesus Christ .....	3
2 A Vision of the Son of Man .....	9
3 The Church in Ephesus .....	15
4 The Church in Smyrna .....	21
5 The Church in Pergamum .....	27
6 The Church in Thyatira .....	33
7 The Church in Sardis .....	39
8 The Church in Philadelphia .....	45
9 The Church in Laodicea .....	51
10 The Throne Room of Heaven .....	59
11 The Scroll .....	67
12 The Opening of the Seals .....	73
13 The 144,000 and the Great Multitude .....	81
14 The Seventh Seal and the Sounding of the Trumpets .....	87
15 The Angel and the Scroll .....	95
16 The Two Witnesses .....	101
17 The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet .....	107
18 The Woman, the Child and the Dragon .....	113
19 The Beast out of the Sea .....	121
20 The Beast out of the Earth .....	127

21 The 144,000 Voice Choir .....	133
22 The Harvest of the Earth .....	137
23 The Seven Bowls Poured Out .....	143
24 Beauty and the Beast .....	149
25 Babylon's Fall .....	155
26 The Fall of the Beast and the False Prophet.....	159
27 The Defeat of the Dragon and Death.....	165
28 The Heavenly City .....	171
29 The Conclusion of the Vision .....	175
30 Putting Back the Pieces.....	181

## PREFACE

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Revelation is one of the most difficult books of the Bible to understand. My goal in writing this commentary is not to answer all the questions the reader might have. I myself have many unanswered questions about the prophecies in this book. The apostle John, who wrote this prophecy, struggled to grasp what the Lord was showing him.

I hope the reader, however, will gain a new appreciation of three important truths. First, there is an end to life as we know it today. God will overthrow the powers of evil and righteousness will triumph. Second, the Christian life is a life of perseverance. The believer will be called on to suffer for his or her faith. Third, victory belongs to Christ and all who trust in Him. Though Satan's efforts will intensify as the end approaches, God is greater than our enemy. In Christ we are more than overcomers. Because of Christ, heaven is our glorious hope. The day is coming when we will see the Lord face to face. All our trials will be over when we see Him.

It is my hope that readers of this devotional commentary will be encouraged in their commitment to the Lord and His ultimate purposes for them. Take your time reading each chapter. Open your Bible and read it along with the commentary. Ask the Lord to open your heart to the truth. The

true teacher is the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to guide you as you work through this important Bible book.

This book, along with the others in this series, will be shipped to believers around the world for their encouragement and support. If this book has been a blessing to you, pray with me that God will use it to strengthen, encourage and comfort all who read it so that His kingdom will be strengthened.

F. Wayne MacLeod

# 1

## A REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

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Read Revelation 1:1-8

What is the central focus of the book of Revelation? John tells us that his book is a revelation of Jesus Christ (verse 1). Jesus is its central theme. The book was written to make Him and His purposes known. It is important that we keep this focus in mind. Revelation will describe for us how our risen Lord Jesus will defeat all our enemies. This book is a revelation of Jesus and his final victory over the world, Satan, death and the forces of hell.

Notice how this revelation came to us. Verse 1 tells us that God the Father revealed these things to His Son. His Son made them known to His angel who, in turn, revealed them to John. He wrote them down as we have them today. This vision is not of human origin. John is simply a witness to what he heard and saw.

Because this word is the Word of God, there is a blessing attached to it. Notice in verse 3 three conditions for this



blessing. The blessing is for those who read, hear and take to heart. You can read this book and receive no blessing from it if you do not also hear what it says and put it into practice. All three of these conditions must be met before we can expect the blessing of this book to be ours. As we continue in our meditation, we will find that keeping the words of this book will not be easy. Some will suffer persecution. Others will die for the cause of Christ. The key word in chapters 2 and 3 is the word "overcome." To overcome implies suffering and obstacles. The blessing is for the person who faces these obstacles and overcomes in obedience in the name of the Lord.

The letter is addressed to the seven churches in Asia. We do not know why these churches are singled out. The letter of John was intended to go to these churches as an encouragement and challenge to them in their trials. The book was written in a time of persecution. John, the author, had been exiled to the island of Patmos because of his faith (verse 9). The seven churches were also suffering because of this persecution. It is beautiful to see how the Lord is concerned about these particular churches. He calls them by name and knows exactly what they are facing.

John sends his greetings to the seven churches from the three members of the Trinity. Greetings are sent from "Him who is, who was, and who is to come." John also sends greeting from the seven spirits before the throne and from Jesus Christ. Let us consider these beings separately.

John sends greetings, first, from Him "who is, who was, and who is to come" (verse 4). God is an eternal God. He is the infinite God who created the world and will be there

when it ends. He has no beginning. He has no end. Everything else will come and go, but God remains unaffected by time and circumstances.

Second, greetings are sent from the seven spirits before the throne. Who are these seven spirits? Notice that the greetings from the seven spirits are sandwiched between greetings from the Father (verse 4) and the Son (verse 5). It is not possible to see these spirits as anything less than God Himself. A note in the NIV Bible suggests that another possible translation of the phrase "seven spirits" could be "sevenfold spirit."

The number seven is very important in the book of Revelation. God created the world in six days and on the seventh day He rested. This number came to symbolize perfection and completeness. The Holy Spirit may be associated with the number seven to remind us of His perfection and completeness.

As we have already mentioned, the central focus of this book is the person of Jesus Christ. John sends his greetings to the seven churches in the name of the Lord Jesus. Notice what John tells us about the Lord Jesus here.

He is the "faithful witness" (verse 5). He is faithful in two ways. He is faithful first in what He tells us about God. John described Him in his gospel as the Word of God (John 1:1). He perfectly represents God and His purpose. What He says is true and a perfect expression of the heart of God. His is a faithful witness of the heart of the Father. Second, Jesus was faithful also in what he did. Though He suffered and died, He was faithful to what the Father had called Him to do.

John also tells us that Jesus was the "firstborn from the dead" (verse 5). There were other people raised from the dead prior to Jesus. Jesus had raised people from the dead. All of these He raised, however, would die again. When Jesus rose, He rose to die no more. He alone truly conquered death.

He is the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (verse 5). The most powerful of rulers on earth must one day bow the knee to Jesus. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. All will answer to Him.

John also reminds us of what Jesus did. He loves us and freed us from our sins (verse 5). How much did He love us? He was willing to die for us. He suffered the cruel death of the cross for us. There is no greater love than this. John 15:13 tells us:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Dying for another is the ultimate expression of love. There is no greater price a person can pay. Jesus did this willingly and lovingly for us.

Through His death, Christ made us to be a "kingdom of priests" (verse 6). In the Old Testament, only the priest had the privilege of approaching and serving God. Today, because of the death of Christ, you and I have the right to approach God boldly (see Hebrews 4:16). We are His chosen servants. We have the joy of representing Him before the world. There could be no greater honor than this.

For who He is and what He has done, Jesus deserves all our praise and adoration (verse 6). He alone is worthy of

glory and power. Power and glory in the hands of anyone else would be a terrifying thing. This power and glory belong to one person and one person alone. No one but Christ is worthy of it. No one but Christ can handle it.

John told his readers that this glorified Jesus is going to appear in the clouds of the sky (verse 7). Can you imagine that day? What a glorious day that will be. Our eyes will see the One we love. His coming will be observed by all. He will not return as He came the first time. When He came as a baby, He came quietly. When He comes this time, every eye will see Him. What a terrible day it will be for those who do not know Him. Even those who pierced Him will see Him. There will be a mixture of joy and mourning on the day of His appearing. Those who know Him will be ecstatic with joy. Those who pierced Him and rejected Him will grieve and be terrified.

This Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega (verse 8). He is the A and the Z, the beginning and the end. He always was and always will be. He is the Almighty God. What a joy it is to know Him. It is this great God that sends His greetings to the seven churches in Asia. God, in all three persons, takes the time to greet the seven churches. There could be no greater honor.

For Consideration:

- What is the central theme of the book of Revelation? How should this help us in our interpretation of the book?
- What are the conditions for the blessing promised in this book? Is it easy to meet these conditions?

- What comfort do you find in the fact that God is an eternal God?
- How was Jesus faithful as a witness? Have you been a faithful witness?
- What does it mean for us to be priests of Christ today? Have you represented Him faithfully as a priest?
- How will Jesus' second coming differ from His coming as a baby? Will you be ready for His return?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to teach you about Himself and His ways as you study this book of Revelation.
- Ask God to give you grace to hear and obey the truth of this book.
- Thank God that He is an eternal God. Thank Him that He never changes. Thank Him that, as an eternal God, you can count on Him always.
- Thank the Lord that He has called you to be His representative on this earth. Ask Him to give you grace to be a faithful witness.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His work on the cross. Thank Him that He is coming back. Thank Him for the hope you have as a believer because of Him.

## 2

# A VISION OF THE SON OF MAN

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Read Revelation 1:9-20

As we begin this section, notice what the apostle John tells us about himself in verse 9. He is a brother and companion to the believers in the seven churches.

They are brothers because they have the same Heavenly Father. Through the work of the Lord Jesus these men and women had become children of God and heirs of eternal life.

John is also a companion. The word companion refers to someone who participates with another in a particular experience. It is possible to be a brother and not a companion. Companions are often more intimately related than brothers because of their shared experiences. John is both a brother and a companion. He is related to these believers through their common Father but he also shares with them a common experience.

What experience does the apostle John share with his readers? Verse 9 tells us that he shares in three experiences. He shares first in their suffering. John was exiled to the island of Patmos for the cause of the gospel at the time of writing. He was not alone in his suffering. His readers also suffered for the same cause.

John shares also in the kingdom. While they were called to suffer here below, both John and his readers shared a common hope of glory. Their eyes were focused on their heavenly home. They also shared in Christ's present reign in their hearts.

Finally, John shared with his brothers in patient endurance. Together they endured hardship for the cause of their Lord. Together they persevered in their trials. John was united to these believers in this perseverance.

Notice that it was on the Lord's Day (Sunday) that the apostle John received his vision from the Lord. Though John is exiled from his fellow believers, no one can take away his fellowship with the Lord. There in his place of exile the Lord spoke to him and drew close to him. Here in this place of exile, God has John's full and undivided attention. There are no distractions. There is no work to do. He is alone and isolated. Sometimes God will put us in these places of isolation to get our attention and speak to our heart.

In his vision, John heard a loud voice. It sounded like a great trumpet blast. The voice John heard told him to take a scroll and write what he would see and send it to the seven churches in Asia.

John turned around to see who was speaking. He saw seven golden lampstands. Among the lampstands was a

person like the "son of man." This person was dressed in a long robe with a golden sash around his chest. Obviously, He was a man of great importance. By his dress, this man may have been a priest.

John noticed that the man's hair was like wool, as white as snow. White hair in Biblical times was a sign of dignity, wisdom and purity. His eyes were like blazing fire, his feet like glowing bronze and his voice like the sound of rushing waters. The reference to fire would again indicate purity, holiness and justice.

In his right hand he held seven stars. Out of his mouth came a sharp two edged sword. The word of God is compared to a two edged sword in Hebrews 4.12. It cuts deeply. It carries authority.

The face of the individual John saw glowed like the sun shining in all its brilliance; his whole being shone with the radiance of fire and bright light. This was a glorious and awesome being.

When he saw this man, John fell at his feet as though dead. His mind was not able to handle what he saw. So awesome was this being that John felt he would die if he looked for a moment longer. He fell lifeless at his feet.

Recognizing his fear, the person in John's vision reached out to him, placed his right hand on him and said, "Do not be afraid, I have conquered death. I was dead but now I live. I hold the keys to death and hell" (verses 17-18).

The fact that this man placed his right hand on him is an indication of his favour toward John. John had nothing to fear in the presence of this great and awesome being.



The person John saw that day was the Lord Jesus in His glorified state. Notice that He told John that He held the keys to death and hell. He who has the keys has authority over death and hell. Jesus declares Himself to have conquered both death and hell.

What an encouragement this must have been to John and to the seven churches in Asia. The Lord Jesus Christ had acquired, by his death and resurrection, the keys of hell and death. He had conquered both. This only adds to the glory and majesty of the Lord whom John saw that day.

There is another comfort for these believers in the final verses of this chapter. John saw our Lord in the midst of the lampstands holding seven stars in his hands.

Verse 20 tells us that the seven stars represent the angels of the seven churches. An angel is a messenger. It is possible that the seven stars represented the leaders of these seven persecuted churches. The seven lampstands represented the seven churches as lights in this sinful world.

Notice the relationship between Christ, the stars (leaders) and the lampstands (churches). In verse 13 John saw Christ in the midst of the lampstands. Remember that these churches were being persecuted. In their persecution they needed to be reminded that Christ was in their midst. As for the stars or leaders of those churches, they were in the right hand of the Lord (16). Notice again the reference to the right hand of the Lord. These leaders were in a place of favour. God had a special concern for them. In His hands they would be secure.

He who held the stars in His right hand and walked among the lampstands is still our God. He holds the keys of hell and death. He is Lord. In your trials remember that He still

reigns. He does not abandon us. He walks among us and holds us in His hand.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between a brother and a companion? How can we be both a brother or sister and a companion to the members of the body of Christ?
- In his isolation the apostle John heard the voice of the Lord God. How does God use trials to get our attention and draw us closer?
- What was the response of John to the glorified Christ? Who is Jesus to you?
- What encouragement do you take from the fact that Jesus holds the keys of death and hell?
- Jesus is seen in John's vision as walking among the lampstands and holding the seven stars in His hands. What do the lampstands and the stars symbolize? How does this picture encourage you today?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be a brother (or sister) and companion for the believers around you.
- Thank the Lord for times when He got your attention through suffering. Thank Him for some particular lessons He taught you at that time.
- Thank the Lord for His glory and majesty. Thank Him that while He is an awesome and glorious God, He still holds us in His hands.

- Thank the Lord that He has the keys of death and hell. Thank Him that our life and death is in His hands. Thank Him that He will one day lock Satan and his angels in hell forever.

### 3

## THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

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Read Revelation 2:1-7

One of the greatest temptations for us as committed Christians is to get so wrapped up in what we do for the Lord that we neglect the Lord Himself. Church activities and the fight for truth can actually cause us to lose sight of the reason for our faith. Countless believers around the world have fallen prey to the temptation of the enemy to be happy with a cause or a set of doctrines. Tradition and doctrine will not fill the empty void in our lives. Our focus needs to be on the Lord Jesus. How easy it is to lose sight of Him in the midst of our activity. This was the temptation of the church in Ephesus.

John wrote to the angel (leader) as the representative of the church of Ephesus. Notice that the letter comes from Him who "holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands" (verse 1). We have

already met this person in chapter one. This is none other than the Lord Jesus, who walks among His people and holds them in His hand.

In this letter to the church of Ephesus, the Lord Jesus commended the church for their deeds, their hard work and their perseverance. Let's look more closely at these three words.

The Lord saw the deeds of the church in Ephesus. The Greek word refers to something that is created by an artist. It was the practical and visible result of hard work, the fruit of their labour. When one looked at the church in Ephesus they could see evidence that they were faithful servants. We are not told what these deeds were but here was a church that ministered practically to those around them.

Second, the church in Ephesus was commended for their hard work. The Greek word indicates an intense effort associated with difficulty or trial. It was not easy for the church in Ephesus. They encountered much difficulty in their desire to live for the Lord. They came face to face with persecution. It required hard work to remain true to their commitment to Christ. The Lord Jesus saw their struggle.

Third, the church in Ephesus was commended for their perseverance. What is perseverance? It is the ability to remain faithful without deviating from the path. It is the characteristic of one who remains devoted to a purpose despite the obstacles that come his or her way. This was the case for the church in Ephesus. They were devoted to the Lord and His glory. Nothing would keep them from being faithful to Him.

There were many temptations for the church in Ephesus. Verse 2 tells us that the church had to deal with false

teachers who came to Ephesus claiming to be apostles. The church examined them and found them to be false. They are also commended for their rejection of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We do not know much about the Nicolaitans but it is clear that they did not preach the truth. The church of Ephesus was able to recognize error. They rejected those who taught false doctrine and stood up for the truth of God. This says a lot about the church. Here was a church that could discern truth from error. Here was a church that was committed to knowing and proclaiming the truth.

The Lord recognizes in verse 3 that the church in Ephesus had endured much persecution and hardship for His name. While they had endured much they had not lost heart nor had they grown weary in their struggle. These commendations by the Lord say much about the church in Ephesus. We need more churches like this in our day.

Notice, however, that the Lord had one thing against the Ephesians' church. He told them in verse 4 that they had lost their first love. How could a church like the church in Ephesus ever be accused of losing its first love? Did their perseverance and faithfulness to the Lord not prove that they loved God? Is it possible for a church that is doctrinally pure and willing to suffer hardships for the Lord to have lost its first love for him? Obviously, from the passage, it is not only possible but this is exactly what had happened to the church of Ephesus.

There are many couples committed to their marriage. They would never dream of being unfaithful to their partner. They are committed to their family. They are willing to suffer hardships in marriage. They believe that solid marriages are one of the building blocks of our society. Though they are committed to their partners, however, they have

lost their first love. The glow has faded. The couple has settled down into a routine. They do not enjoy the intimacy and closeness they once enjoyed. They remain faithful to each other but the romance and delight is long gone.

Many churches are like this. You cannot fault them in regard to their commitment to the truth. Like the couple mentioned above, they have settled into a routine. They are more committed to the routine and traditions than to the Lord. God wants our hearts not our loveless commitment to truth and traditions.

Do you love the Lord? I am not asking if you love the doctrines of the church. Nor am I asking if you are committed to the cause of the church. I am not even asking if you are willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. The question is simply, "do you love Jesus." Is He the focus of your heart's desire? Do you love Him more than your doctrine? Do you love Him more than the cause of the church? Do you love Him more than what you can do for Him? Doctrine is great but Christ is greater. The church, as the bride of Christ, is beautiful but Christ is infinitely more beautiful.

This may seem to be a minor point, but the Lord felt so strongly about this issue that He told the church in Ephesus that if they did not recognize the height from which they had fallen and repent, He would remove their lampstand (verse 5).

Notice two things here in verse 5. First, the Lord told the church that they had fallen. They had fallen away from Him and no longer loved Him with the passion they once loved Him with. Second, the church of Ephesus needed to repent. That is to say, they had fallen into sin. Do you realize that if you do not love Christ with the love you once loved

Him you have fallen into sin? In fact, this sin was so serious that the Lord threatens to remove His light from their midst if they do not renew that love and seek Him passionately as they had at first.

This tells us something about the relationship the Lord wants with us as His children. He is looking for a passionate and loving relationship more than servants who exercise their duty. It is amazing to think that the Creator of this world longs for this kind of relationship with us.

All too many churches have been lured by Satan into loving the cause of Christ more than Christ. They have been seduced into loving doctrine more than they love Christ. As important as these things are, they ought never to distract us from our love of Christ. A church that puts doctrine and the cause of Christ ahead of Christ is guilty of idolatry. Their light will quickly go out.

The heart of Christ is for intimacy with His people. He wants to see His people love Him more than anything else. Christ does not want to share you with anyone else. The church in Ephesus was a wonderful church. They had been faithful in persecution. They had defended the faith. They were, to all appearances, walking faithfully with their Lord. Where they failed, however, was by loving the cause of Christ more than Christ. Don't allow yourself to fall into this trap.

The Lord ends his letter with a challenge to the church of Ephesus. If they had ears to hear what the Spirit was telling them, they were to listen and obey. Those who overcame would eat from the tree of life. What do we know about the tree of life? Genesis 3:22-24 tells us that the tree had the power to give eternal life. The promise to the church in Ephesus is that he who overcame would have



eternal life. In particular, the church of Ephesus was to overcome in the area of their love for the Lord. For the Ephesians, the temptation was to love doctrine and the cause of Christ more than Christ. They were to overcome this temptation and make Christ the central focus of their heart. We need to do the same.

#### For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have in this passage that the church of Ephesus was serious about serving the Lord?
- What evidence is there here in this passage that the church of Ephesus was serious about defending the truth?
- Why was the loss of love such a big issue for the Lord? What does this tell us about what is really important to Him?
- The church of Ephesus would die if it did not find its love for Jesus again. Is this true for the church today as well? Explain.
- Do you love the Lord Jesus more than anything else?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to serve Him and stand firmly on the truth of His Word.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for loving His cause and His truth more than you love Him.
- Ask God to renew your church so that it again discovers the delight of knowing God.

## 4

# THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

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Read Revelation 2:8-11

As Christians, we can have victory over our circumstances. God will use whatever suffering we face to accomplish His purposes in our lives. He is always in control. Though the enemy appears to be winning the battle, we can be confident that God will never let us go.

The letter to the church in Smyrna comes from "Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again." We met this person in Revelation 1:17-18. The Lord Jesus had conquered death. We need to remember that the church in general was going through a time of persecution. Receiving a letter from Him who had conquered death would have been an encouragement to them.

The Lord Jesus was aware of the afflictions and poverty of the church in Smyrna. When He spoke to the church of Ephesus, the Lord said He noticed their "hard work" (Revelation 2:2). Here in Smyrna the Lord noticed their afflictions. This word is a strong word indicating more intense struggle than in the Ephesians' church. The word "poverty"

in the Greek refers to a person who is reduced to begging for his or her existence.

It is quite possible that the church of Smyrna had become poor because of her commitment to the cause of Christ. Christianity was not well received at this point in history. Christians were seen as radicals who followed strange teachings. This led to persecution. Some commentators believe that Christians of Smyrna were being robbed and stripped of their earthly belongings because of their faith. A blind eye was being turned to this injustice.

The Lord told the church that despite their poverty, they were rich. While they had very little in this life physically, spiritually they were living in abundance. The wonderful thing about our faith is that it is greater than our physical circumstances. We can be persecuted and living in the most severe poverty and still be the most contented of people.

In Christ we can have victory over our circumstances. One of the most beautiful illustrations of this is the example of Stephen in Acts 6. The Jews dragged him out of the city to stone him because of his faith. As they stoned Stephen, they noticed a glow on his face. Stephen's eyes were directed heavenward. He saw the Lord seated on His throne. He rejoiced because he was going to be with Him. Though physically tormented, Stephen had a rejoicing heart, fully at peace with God. The church in Smyrna knew this victory over circumstances. Though they were physically destitute, they abounded in spiritual joy and peace. They were drawn closer to the Lord in their suffering.

The persecution of the church in Smyrna came in the form of physical poverty. It also came in the form of slander. In verse 9 the Lord told the church that He was aware of what

people were saying about them. The church was being slandered by the Jews. We do not know what the Jews were saying about the believers in Smyrna. We can only imagine the lies that were being invented to blacken the name of the believers in Smyrna.

As we have already mentioned, the people who were slandering the believers of Smyrna were Jews. Notice what the Lord said about them. According to the Lord in verse 9 these slanderers claimed to be Jews but were not. They may have been Jewish in nationality but they were certainly not true Jews in heart and thought. The true Jew was one who loved God. These Jews did not love God. They were His enemies. They belonged to the synagogue of Satan. They listened to and served the devil and his cause.

In verse 10, the Lord told the church in Smyrna not to be afraid of what they were going to suffer. The Lord did not remove their persecution. As He did in the days of Job, the Lord allowed Satan to test them. He told the church that the devil would put some of them in prison. We get the impression from verse 10 that some of them would even have to die for their faith. Notice, however, that the persecution was limited in time. Verse 10 tells us that the persecution would be for ten days. God had set a limit on Satan. In the case of Job, Satan could only do what the Lord allowed him to do. God would not allow them to suffer beyond what they are able to handle.

God challenged the Christians in Smyrna to persevere even if it meant death. If they died they would be given the crown of life by "Him who was dead and is now alive." Notice what the apostle Paul tells us about this crown in 1 Corinthians 9:25:

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

The promise of God to the church of Smyrna was that those who overcame would not be hurt by the second death. What is the second death? The Scripture teaches that there are two births. There is a physical birth by which we enter this world and a spiritual birth by which we become children of God. Physical death needs no explanation. After our death, however, we will all be judged. Those whose names are not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire out of the presence of God. This is the second death. Revelation 20:14 makes this clear:

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.  
This is the second death.

The challenge to the church in Smyrna was to persevere even to the shedding of blood. Their physical death was not the end. They would, by their faithfulness, receive the crown of life and escape the wrath of God in the lake of fire.

The church of Smyrna was a persecuted and suffering church. God reminded them that He had seen their affliction and would come to their aid. He had not forgotten them in their pain. He encouraged them to persevere. Those who did would receive their eternal reward.

## For Consideration:

- The letter to the church in Smyrna comes from Him who had died and come back to life. What comfort do you find in the fact that the Lord God does not allow us to go through what He Himself had not gone through and conquered?
- The believers in Smyrna lived in poverty but God called them rich. Is it always God's purpose for us to live with physical riches and wealth?
- Is it possible for us as believers to live contented lives in the midst of persecution and difficulty?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that God limits what Satan can do to us?
- What is the second death? Is this a death from which we can escape? How?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He knows what we are facing and can identify with our needs and infirmity.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to walk faithfully with Him even when things are difficult.
- Ask God to help you to fix your eyes on Him and not on your physical possessions.
- Thank the Lord that He rescued you from the second death. Ask Him to reach out now to your friends and loved ones who do not know him.



## 5

# THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

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Read Revelation 2:12-17

Our enemy Satan is a master of cunning and deceit. If we are not constantly on our guard, he will penetrate our ranks. The church in Pergamum had let down their guard. They needed to be awakened to what was taking place in their midst.

The letter to the church in Pergamum came from "Him who has the sharp, double edged sword" (verse 12). We met this person in Revelation 1:16. The two edged sword, representing His word, is seen coming out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

This word, as a double-edged sword is powerful. By it, the world was formed. His word will also judge and condemn those who remain in their sin. In verse 16 the Lord told the church in Pergamum that if they did not repent He would fight them with the sword of His mouth. They would be judged for their sins. This shows us the importance of what



the Lord was going to tell them. If they did not listen they would be judged by the word of the Lord.

The Lord begins His letter to the church of Pergamum by reminding them that He knew where they lived. They lived where Satan had his throne. Their city was the center of Satan's activity. Commentators tell us that the city of Pergamum was the center of Emperor worship. It was also the city where the government proconsul lived. It may have been in this city that the decisions were being made about the persecution of the church.

It was not easy to live in Pergamum. Satan's activity was evident throughout the city. We have reference here to the death of a man by the name of Antipas. We know nothing about this man other than the fact that he died for the cause of Christ in the city of Pergamum. He is described as the Lord's faithful witness. This is one example of the activities that were going on in Pergamum.

The believers in Pergamum remained faithful to the Lord, despite the persecution. The Lord recognized that His people there had not renounced their faith. They had remained true to His name. He commended them for this.

The Lord had two things against the church in Pergamum, however. There were people in the church who had fallen prey to the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

We do not have any information concerning the Nicolaitans. A reference was made to them in the church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:6). The church in Ephesus had resisted the teaching of this group. The church in Pergamum did not do so well. Some had fallen into their evil ways.

Other people in the church had fallen prey to the teachings of Balaam. From the book of Numbers we understand that Balak asked Balaam to curse the Israelites (Numbers 23:11). The Lord kept Balaam from cursing His people but when Balaam left the region of Moab, Israel quickly fell into sexual immorality with the Moabite women. These women drew the Israelites into idolatry (see Numbers 24:25-25:3). The Lord eventually sent a plague to the Israelite camp. In Numbers 31:16 we see that these Moabite women had been advised by Balaam. While Balaam did not curse the people of Israel for Balak, his advice to the Moabite women eventually brought the curse of God on them as a nation when they fell into immorality and idol worship with them.

There were individuals in Pergamum who were falling into the teaching of Balaam. According to our passage, Balaam taught Balak how to entice the Israelites to sin. He did so through the Moabite women. These women lured Israel into the worship of idols and sexual immorality, which was associated with the pagan practices of the day. There were people in the church of Pergamum who were being tempted to worship idols and commit sexual immorality. The Lord called the church to repentance lest He judge them with the sword of His mouth.

It is easy to feel that these sins are far removed from us. Let us not be deceived, however, into thinking that we are sheltered from these temptations as a church today. We are seeing an increasing number of cases of immorality in our churches. The issue of idolatry in our church is never far removed from us either. How often do we worship our traditions, our doctrines, our money, our job or our leisure? Balaam's advice is very subtle. It creeps into our church unawares. We all need to examine ourselves.

God told the church in Pergamum that the one who overcame would receive hidden manna and a white stone (verse 17). Let's look briefly at these two articles.

God had fed His people in the desert with manna. In John 6 people came to Jesus looking for a sign similar to the sign of the manna God had given to their forefathers in the wilderness. Jesus told them that He was the Bread come down from heaven (John 6:35). He was the manna they looked for. From this statement we can understand that Jesus is the hidden manna. He is the reward of those who persevere.

Concerning the white stone, there are many possible interpretations. Some commentators feel it refers to the legal practice of giving a white stone to a man judged innocent. The stone was proof of his innocence. The color white is the color of purity. For the man carrying that white stone it was a symbol of his forgiveness.

Notice that a new name was written on the stone. A person's name represented his character. The fact that the name is new indicates that the person carrying the stone is not only forgiven but also has been changed in character and nature.

The fact that this new name was known only to the individual concerned shows us that this was a very personal matter. The work God was doing in this person was a very intimate work. I cannot truly know if someone else has become a new person in Christ but I can know this work in myself. There are things in my life that God is changing that are known to no one else but myself and God.

The church of Pergamum was in a city that was the center of Satan's activity. As believers, sometimes we live in the

midst of horrible circumstances. God does not always spare us from trials and struggles. Unable to resist, some in Pergamum had fallen into the sin and error around them. Others, however, persevered and received the white stone, the symbol of God's approval.

What do you face in your life today? Do you see evidence of the work of Satan all around you? Do you struggle with the overwhelming temptations that surround you? Consider for a moment the reward of faithfulness. Christ the hidden manna awaits you with a white stone. Will you run toward Him and receive this reward? Will you overcome and enter His presence forgiven and clean?

#### For Consideration:

- Pergamum is described as being the center of Satan's activities. It was a political center. What does this tell us about how Satan can use leaders to accomplish his purposes?
- What evidence is there in your land of the work of Satan?
- How has the church of your community been tempted by Satan? Is there evidence of believers falling into these errors?
- Balaam seemed to teach the Moabites how to tempt the Israelites through immorality and idolatry. Are immorality and idolatry issues for the church of our day? Explain.
- What work has God been doing in your life? How has He been changing your character?
- What keeps you from receiving the white stone of forgiveness and purity today?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to resist Satan and his temptations in your life.
- Ask God to give you grace to persevere and be faithful to Him in the midst of a world filled with evil and sin.
- Ask God to protect you from immoral thoughts and actions. Ask Him to keep you from any form of idolatry or anything that would take His place.
- Take a moment to pray that God would give your church the grace to resist the temptations of the world.
- Thank God that He is working in your life in a very personal way. Thank Him for the things He has been changing in you. Ask Him to continue to shape and mould you into His image.

## 6

# THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

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Read Revelation 2:18-29

Have you ever seen a perfect church? It seems that every church, no matter how good it is, has its faults. The church in Thyatira was no exception.

The letter to the church in Thyatira is from the Son of God. His eyes are described as blazing fire and His feet as bronze. This is a description of the Lord John saw in Revelation 1:14-15.

The Lord was fully aware of what was going on in the church of Thyatira. He mentions six positive characteristics in this church. We will examine these characteristics briefly here.

First, the Lord saw the deeds of the church of Thyatira. Their deeds were the practical fruit of their faith in the Lord. While it is not mentioned what these deeds were, clearly this was a church that lived out their faith in a practical way.

The second characteristic mentioned here is love. To whom is this love directed? It seems that this love was both for one another and for the Lord. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus responded by saying in Matthew 22:37-39:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.

The church in Thyatira demonstrated this love.

Thyatira was also an example in faith. They placed their trust in the Lord their God and His word, committing themselves to trust and obey Him even when they could not understand His ways.

The fourth characteristic of the church in Thyatira was their service. The Greek word used here is the word from which we get the English word "deacon." It is the quality of one who serves another. A deacon was one who cared for the practical needs of the congregation. The Lord took note of the way in which the church in Thyatira ministered to each other.

Fifth, the church in Thyatira was a persevering church. They were steadfast in their commitment to the Lord and His cause despite the obstacles they encountered. Persevering implies trial. The church in Thyatira struggled because of their faith. They were committed, however, to upholding the name of Christ in their trials.

Notice finally that the church in Thyatira was a growing church. Their growth was not so much in numbers as in

quality. Verse 19 tells us that they were "doing more than they did at first." The question can be asked: what were they doing more of now? It seems that the answer is that they were doing more of all that the Lord had commended them for in this letter. They were doing more deeds of faith. They were more loving towards one another and towards God. They were growing in their faith. They were ministering more to one another and they were persevering more in their faith. Could this be said of us?

While the church in Thyatira had many positive attributes, it was not a perfect church. The problem with the church in Thyatira was that it tolerated the woman Jezebel.

Who is this woman Jezebel? From the context we understand that she promoted idolatry and sexual immorality. This was the sin of Balaam in Revelation 2:14. 1 Kings tells us that Jezebel was a very wicked queen. She enticed the children of God into idolatry and sexual immorality. As the most wicked of all the queens of Israel and Judah, her name came to represent idolatry, immorality and evil manipulation. The church in Thyatira was being enticed by her ways. The name Jezebel here represents those who lived in idolatry and immorality.

Notice how God would deal with this problem in Thyatira? He gave "Jezebel" and her followers time to repent. God's first desire was to see repentance. He took no delight in the destruction of sinners. As evil as they were, He wanted to forgive them.

Jezebel and her followers refused to repent. Because they refused to listen to the Lord, He would judge them. His anger was tempered with patience, love and compassion, but it was real. The passage tells us that God would cast Jezebel and her followers on a "bed of suffering." God would



strike her children dead. Her children were those who followed in her ways --the ways of immorality and idolatry.

What would be the result of the judgment of those who followed the evil ways of Jezebel? Verse 23 tells us that all the churches would know that God searches out the hearts and minds of His people. Nothing can be hidden from God. We get the impression that Jezebel's followers were doing these things in secret. Maybe the other members of the church were not aware of their ways. When God judged them, however, their secrets would be exposed. The church would see their evil and realize that God saw even those things done in hiding.

God challenged those who had not fallen prey to Satan and his hidden or secret ways to remain faithful. The Lord was unwilling to impose any further burden on the church than the burden to remain faithful in the midst of the evil that surrounded them (verse 24). The Lord knew their limits and would not give them more than they could support.

There was a great reward for the one who overcame. Those who overcame would be given authority over nations. As believers we will one day rule with the Lord. The present earthly powers will be broken. Notice that the rule of the Lord will be with a sceptre of iron. A sceptre of iron is a rule of power and authority that cannot be broken.

God also promises a second reward for overcoming. John told the church in Thyatira that those who overcame would be given the morning star. Revelation 22:16 tells us that Jesus is the Morning Star. The ultimate reward for the believers in Thyatira was to be with Christ. There could be no greater reward than this.

The church in Thyatira was being tempted by Satan to follow the evil ways of Jezebel. This was a life of immorality and idolatry. There were individuals who were falling into this trap and wandering away from the truth. Moral standards were being compromised and other things were taking the place of the Lord Jesus in their lives. God challenges the church to deal with these issues and commends those who had resisted these temptations.

This temptation is very real in the church of our day as well. May God give us grace to walk in moral purity turning our backs on anything that would take His place in our lives.

#### For Consideration:

- What are the positive qualities listed for the church in Thyatira? Do you demonstrate these qualities personally?
- Have you been growing your relationship with Christ like the church in Thyatira?
- What was the "secret" sin in the church of Thyatira? Are there any secret sins in your life?
- How does knowing that nothing is hidden from God affect what we do?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to demonstrate the positive qualities of the church in Thyatira.
- Ask God to search your heart and expose any hidden sins.

- Thank the Lord that He knows how much we can handle and will not burden us with more than we are able to bear.
- Thank the Lord that He will be our greatest reward.

## 7

# THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

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Read Revelation 3:1-6

Not all churches that appear to have life are really alive. It is possible to have a reputation for being alive as a church but be spiritually dead. Activities, church attendance or even beliefs do not make a church alive.

The letter to the church in Sardis comes from Him who held the seven spirits and the seven stars. Revelation 1:20 tells us that the seven stars represent the seven angels (or leaders) of the churches in Asia. Mention is made of the seven spirits in Revelation 1:4. The seven spirits (or sevenfold spirit) appears to represent the Holy Spirit. The number seven may refer to His perfection.

The passage tells us that the Lord held the seven angels and the seven spirits in His hand. The Greek word used here can mean "to have" or "to hold." The word is also used to describe a relationship between two people who are closely joined (such as in the case of marriage). The Lord God who spoke this word to the church was one who had an intimate relationship with the angels (or leaders) of

the seven churches. The fact that the “sevenfold Spirit is held in His hands shows us that He is also in a deep relationship with the Spirit of God. Jesus was the one who would send the Spirit of God to the church to lead, empower and give it life.

The letter tells us that the Lord Jesus knew the deeds of the church in Sardis. We have already seen this expression in the churches of Ephesus and Thyatira. There is a difference here in the church of Sardis. Notice in verse 2 that the Lord told the church that he had not found their deeds to be perfect or complete. What we need to understand here is that the church of Sardis was not demonstrating the fruit they needed to demonstrate in their spiritual walk.

The Lord told them that while they had enjoyed a good reputation they were in fact dead. We understand from this that it is possible for a church to have an appearance of being alive and yet be dead. There are many churches that are socially active in their communities. They are large and growing churches. They attract people by the hundreds. Their worship is lively and appeals to its members. When you dig deeply, however, you find that there is very little spiritual growth and maturity in these churches. The truth of the gospel has been watered down. Nothing that could be an offense is preached. To all intents and purposes these churches are, at best, well run social organizations using the name of Christ, but not centered on Him or His heart. There is no real evidence of the life-giving Spirit of God that the Lord held in His hand.

The call to the church in Sardis was to wake from her sleep and to strengthen what was about to die. Though not completely dead, the church was like a flickering candle. Their light was about ready to go out. The call to wake up was

urgent. Unless something was done immediately, their light would be extinguished.

The call to the church was to strengthen what remained. This shows us that their sleep was not an innocent sleep. This was a sleep of death. As they slept, their life blood was being drained from their veins. In their sleep, they were no longer on their guard. The enemy was taking advantage of their sleep. Each moment they slept was another moment in his hands. Each moment they slept their spiritual heart beat grew fainter. The Lord called out to them to wake up before it was too late. Soon their flickering candle would go out.

In light of their situation, Christ commanded the church in Sardis to remember what they had seen and heard. To what is He referring here? The church had heard the message of the gospel with its power of forgiveness. They had also received the Holy Spirit He held in His hand to give them. They had a calling to be Christ's ambassadors. They had been given Christ's authority. As a church, however, they had not taken these matters seriously. The challenge of the Lord to the church in Sardis was to repent and walk in what they had received.

Notice what would happen if they did not repent. The Lord would come to them like a thief. The imagery of a thief has a twofold importance. First, the thief comes to take away what is ours. The Lord would come like a thief to take away their light. They might continue to function as a social organization, but they would be spiritually dead. Their light would no longer shine. Second, the thief comes when we do not expect him. In an instant, when they were not expecting it, the Lord would come and deal with them.

There were some in the church of Sardis that had not soiled their clothes. They walked with Him in white. White has always symbolized purity. There in the midst of the rottenness of spiritual death could be found these rare precious jewels. The Lord commends these men and women for their faithfulness. The sad reality in Sardis, however, was that these individuals were the exception.

In verse 5 the Lord reminded the church of the three rewards for those who overcame. First, they would be dressed in white. They would know the forgiveness of the Lord. They would shed their old nature tainted with sin and receive a new nature that glorified the name of the Lord.

Second, the names of those who overcame would never be blotted out of the book of life. Their salvation was assured. No one could take away their place in the kingdom of God.

Finally, the Lord Jesus would acknowledge them before His Father and the angels of heaven. He would be proud to call them His children. He would personally plead their case before the Father. They had the approval of the Son of God. Because of the Son's word in their favour, their acceptance before the Father was assured.

Have you been guilty of falling asleep spiritually? I have met people who have become content with where they are in their spiritual life. They have not grown in their walk with God for years. They are no longer being stretched in their faith. Their service for God has been minimal. They practice all the things they have practiced for years and believe in all the right doctrines but in reality they are asleep. May God give us grace to continue to serve and grow in our relationship with Him until our dying day

when we shall stand before Him to receive our rest and reward.

For Consideration:

- What spiritual activities have you been involved in? How is God using these activities to draw you closer to Himself?
- What is the difference between how people see us and how God sees us? Is it possible to have a good reputation in the community but still not be right with God?
- Why are we so tempted to be concerned more with how others see us than with how God sees us?
- What does it mean to be spiritually asleep?
- The Lord challenged the church of Sardis to remember what they had heard and received. What have you received from the Lord? Have you been faithful with this for His glory?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to awaken your heart more to Him and His purposes.
- Ask God to help you to be more concerned about how He sees you than how others see you.
- Ask the Lord to bring to your mind the things He has given to you as a believer. Ask Him to help you to use these things for His glory in your life.





## 8

# THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

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Read Revelation 3:7-13

As believers we will have to face many obstacles in this life. It is important to remember, however, that the Lord Jesus is still in control. He is aware of our struggles. He knows us intimately. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to endure (see 1 Corinthians 10:13). He measures each trial, giving us only what we can handle and what will be for our ultimate good.

The letter to the church in Philadelphia comes from Him who is holy and true. He held the keys of David. We see from Revelation 1:18 that the Lord Jesus held the keys to hell and death. If He holds the keys to hell and death he also holds the keys to heaven and life. Is it possible that the keys of David are to the city of David? What is the city of David? It is the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem often represents the heavenly city. The Lord held the keys to heaven and life. This would be an encouragement to the struggling church in Philadelphia. Their struggle against

sin was intense, but their Lord held the keys to the celestial city and to eternal life. As intense as our battle is against sin, we have an assurance of heaven. No one can take that away. Jesus has opened heaven's door for us. Satan cannot close it on us. We can face our trials with assurance. The threat of death itself cannot distract us from our goal. We have victory over death because the keys are in the hands of our Lord.

Notice that the Lord had opened a door for the church in Philadelphia. What was that door? Verses 9-10 may give us a hint as to the identity of this open door. The church in Philadelphia was struggling with those who were of the synagogue of Satan. We see from the context that those who belonged to the synagogue of Satan were Jews who were being led astray and used by Satan. They were persecuting the church. The Lord told the church in Philadelphia that the day was coming when these Jews would fall down at their feet and recognize that the Lord loved them.

The picture the Lord gives here reminds us of Joseph and his brothers in the Old Testament. Joseph's brothers hated him. They often mocked him and eventually sold him into slavery in Egypt. The Lord lifted Joseph up in authority and power in the land of Egypt. When his brothers came to buy provisions from him, they bowed down to him and recognized that the Lord had blessed him. This was what would happen to the persecuted Christians in Philadelphia. The day was coming when those who persecuted them would recognize the hand of the Lord on their lives and bow down in humility before them.

In part, the door that was opening to the church of Philadelphia was a door of blessing and reward. It was also a door of witness. Even their enemies would recognize the Lord had blessed the church in Philadelphia. From verse

10 we understand that the door was also a door of escape. The church of Philadelphia would be kept from more persecution than they could handle. The Lord was aware that this church was not a strong church. He would not allow them to be tested beyond their ability to endure.

The Lord told the church in Philadelphia to hold fast to what they had and not give up. They were not to allow anyone to take their crown. A crown is the reward an athlete received for finishing a race. This crown was only for those who held firm to the end. They could lose their reward by not persevering. These who persevered to the end, however, will receive an imperishable crown.

Notice also that the one who overcame would be made a pillar in the temple of God. A pillar is permanent. The one who overcame would become a permanent fixture in heaven. The overcomer would never leave the presence of God but would be with Him forever.

The Lord told the church of Philadelphia that He would write three names on those who overcame. He would write the name of God the Father, the name of the New Jerusalem and Christ's new name on them. We write our name on something to indicate that the object belongs to us. God wrote His name on the overcomers because He had claimed them as His own. He wrote the name of the New Jerusalem on them because they belonged to the holy city. Christ wrote His victorious new name on them because He had died to buy them for Himself.

Notice that the name of Christ written on the overcomer was a new name. In times past when a person performed a noble and courageous deed the king would grant him the right to put the title "Sir" in front of his name. This individual

was honoured for his or her courage. The Lord Jesus accomplished, by His death and resurrection, the greatest work of all time. The Father glorified Him and gave Him a name before which every knee must now bow. Paul writes about this in Philippians 2:9-10 when he says:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

It is the name of the conquering Lord Jesus that will be written on the overcomer. He belongs to Christ, the Sovereign Lord of all. Christ is proud to claim him as his and write His new name on him.

The Lord commends the church in Philadelphia for their faithfulness. They were weak but they had persevered. The battle is not for the strong. Many strong Christians have fallen in battle. We have all met men and women we respected and admired and were surprised by their fall. Maybe you know a lot about the Bible. Maybe you have gone to Bible School or Seminary. Maybe you have been a Christian for many years. You could fall as easily as your weaker brother. It is the overcomer who will receive the crown not the strong. May we be overcomers.

For Consideration:

- What are the keys of David? How does knowing that the Lord has these keys give us courage to persevere?

- Philadelphia was a weak church but received a favourable word from the Lord God. Why did they receive a favourable word when they were weak?
- What did God promise would happen to the enemies of Philadelphia?
- God would write three names on the overcomer. What were those names and what did they represent?
- Is the battle always for the strong? What does the church of Philadelphia teach us?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the assurance of salvation.
- Ask God to help you to use the strength you have for His glory.
- Thank the Lord that He claims us as His own and writes His new name on us.
- Ask God to give you grace to be faithful to Him with even the little you have.



## 9

# THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

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Read Revelation 3:14-22

How would you evaluate your spiritual condition? On a scale of one to ten where would you fall? Are you hot or cold? Are you on fire or are you indifferent? Most people would place themselves somewhere in the middle. There is a general tendency in our society to take the middle road. We do not want to stand out too much. We do not want to be different from everyone else. We are content to be lukewarm. This was the problem in the church of Laodicea.

The letter to the church in Laodicea comes from the Amen, the faithful and true witness and the ruler of the creation of God. We understand this to be clearly a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is described here as being the "Amen." "Amen" is an expression we use when we want to confirm what is being said. We say "amen" when we believe something to be true and worthy of our confidence. Jesus is the Amen. He is true and worthy of our confidence.



Jesus is also the faithful and true witness. There may be two reasons for this. First, He persevered to the point of death. He died on the cross of Calvary. He was faithful to death. Second, He is a faithful and true witness because of what He taught and said. All that He spoke was true and worthy of our confidence.

Jesus is also the ruler of the creation of God. Because He was faithful to the end, God has exalted Him. Christ has been given a name that is above every name. He rules over the world. As the great ruler of the universe, every knee must bow to Him.

This ruler of the creation of God was aware of the situation in the church of Laodicea. He saw the church as a lukewarm church. Because they were lukewarm, Christ would spit them out of his mouth. Historians tell us that the town of Laodicea got its water from hot springs located a certain distance away from the town. By the time the water arrived in the town it was lukewarm. Not only was the water they drank lukewarm, so was their spiritual life.

The Lord told the church that He wished they were either cold or hot but because they were lukewarm He would spit them out of His mouth. Jesus told the church that He would rather see them cold than lukewarm. There is more damage caused to the church of Christ because of half-hearted Christians than because of those who are completely indifferent to spiritual matters?

Half-hearted, lukewarm Christians have one foot in the world and the other in the church. They are trying to live in both worlds. They do not have victory over sin in their lives. They are hypocrites. They are in church Sunday morning and in the world and its evil Monday morning. They follow the Lord as long as it is convenient. The Lord Jesus is not

interested in this sort of follower. They only blacken the character of the church and bring dishonour to the name of Christ by their hypocrisy. Either we are for Christ or we are against Him. We must make up our minds.

The church in Laodicea was a rich church. They were rich in material possessions. These possessions drew them away from the Lord. Was it their riches that accounted for their lukewarm commitment to the Lord Jesus? The church, while physically rich, was spiritually destitute. They were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. This is how the Lord saw them.

It is interesting to note the difference of opinion in verse 17. The church saw itself as being rich. Christ saw them as being poor. Obviously there were two standards being used to evaluate the condition of the church. The church in Laodicea looked at the physical. They saw that they were blessed with riches and material possessions. They may have had a large church with many people attending. Maybe they were not suffering like the other churches. People in the church were happy with how things were going. They saw themselves as being quite a good church.

When the Lord looked at the church, however, He did not use the same standard to evaluate their condition. He looked at their hearts. He saw that their hearts were lukewarm and generally indifferent. They were happy with a "social club mentality" when it came to church. They were not committed to the Lord Jesus. Spiritually, they were destitute and naked. Their church had no spiritual impact on its members. People were not being drawn to the Saviour. Its members were not growing in their love for the Lord Jesus. They were content with the externals.

To remedy their problem the Lord challenged the church in Laodicea to buy from Him three articles. First, they were first to buy gold tried in the fire. This gold had nothing to do with physical riches. He who bought this gold was spiritually rich. How could they buy this gold? Isaiah the prophet explains this in Isaiah 55:1-2 when he says:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;  
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!  
Come; buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread,  
and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen,  
listen to me, and eat what is good and your soul  
will delight in the richest of fare.

The riches Christ had to offer the church of Laodicea were bought without money. When they came to Him they would never thirst again. Their souls would be satisfied. He would offer them forgiveness, peace and assurance. He who had nothing in this world but had this gold was rich indeed.

The Laodiceans were also to buy white clothes to cover their nakedness. Commentators tell us that the city of Laodicea was famous for its black wool from which they made their clothes. The Lord told them to remove their black clothes and put on the white garments He would give them. These white garments were garments of purity and pardon. We have already seen that in Sardis those who had remained faithful to the Lord were dressed in white garments (Revelation 3:4). The Lord is offering the Laodiceans these same garments.

Third, the church was to purchase eye salve to heal their eyes. They were spiritually blind. They did not see things as Christ saw them. The region of Laodicea produced a salve for sore eyes. This salve, however, would not heal

their spiritual eyes. Only the Lord could heal their spiritual eyes. If they came to Him, He would heal their blindness. When the Lord touches us we do not see things in the same way. Our eyes are opened to the true meaning and purpose of life. The church in Laodicea needed to have their spiritual eyes opened.

Take notice of why the Lord rebuked the church in Laodicea. Verse 19 tells us that He rebuked them because He loved them. It is true that He wanted to spit them out of His mouth because they were lukewarm but, even so, He had not given up on them. He patiently stood at the door and knocked. He would not force Himself on them. They had to decide for themselves to open the door to Him.

If they opened the door, the Lord would enter and fellowship with them. They could enjoy a close and intimate relationship with the Lord. This is what the church in Laodicea was missing. They had a church but they did not have the Lord. Now was the time for them to open up their hearts and let Him in.

How often have our churches been about doctrine, service and tradition but not about the Lord Jesus? There are some churches that even feel that we shouldn't get too excited about Jesus. They close the door on Jesus and knowing Him in favor of defending a set of beliefs and practices. All the time Jesus stands outside the church longing to come in.

The Laodiceans were challenged to open their hearts and allowed the Lord to come in and fellowship with them. If they did they would be honoured by the Lord and given the privilege to sit with Him in His heavenly kingdom. Despite

being lukewarm, there was still hope for the church in Laodicea. The Lord had not given up on them. He offers them another chance here.

Maybe your spiritual life is like that of the church of Laodicea. Today the Lord is calling you to open your heart and let Him in. He will stir up the fires and bring life to your spirit. Notice however, that He will not force Himself on you. He patiently knocks on your heart's door. Won't you open your heart to him?

#### For Consideration:

- Why is it so easy to be content with being a lukewarm Christian? How would you evaluate your spiritual condition today?
- Why is being lukewarm such a terrible thing in the church today? What damage is caused by lukewarm believers?
- Have you ever felt yourself believing that a big and wealthy church was a healthy church? What does a healthy church look like?
- Why do you suppose Jesus was outside the church in Laodicea? What things occupy the minds and hearts of the people in your church? Where is Jesus in all this?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to open your eyes so you can see yourself as He sees you?
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for being lukewarm in your relationship with Him.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for keeping Him outside when He ought to be the central focus of your heart. Ask Him to show you what things have taken His place in your life.



# 10

## THE THRONE ROOM OF HEAVEN

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Read Revelation 4

Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like? The apostle John gives us a glimpse of the throne room of heaven in chapter 4. When John was on the isle of Patmos he heard a voice calling out to him. The voice was as loud as a trumpet. He recognized this as the same voice that had spoken to him in Revelation 1:10. When John looked, he saw an open door. The voice called him to approach and told him that he would see things that must yet come to pass.

The passage tells us that when he heard the voice, John was in the Spirit. Obviously, the Spirit of the Lord had come on John for the purpose of showing him the things that were yet to happen. The apostle John was lifted up, like many prophets of old, in a vision to see what no human eye had ever seen. The prophet Ezekiel was brought to see the city of Jerusalem by means of a similar vision (Ezekiel 40:1-20).



John was taken in this vision to the throne room of heaven. Seated on the throne was one whose appearance was like jasper and carnelian. The jasper spoken of here is likely a transparent stone. Something that is transparent has no impurities. It may represent the perfection of the One seated on the throne. The carnelian stone was a red stone. Some commentators describe it as bloody or fiery red. Red is often a symbol of blood or fire. Blood represents the payment of sin. Fire represents holiness and justice of God. These stones may represent the justice, holiness and purity of the One seated on the throne?

John also noticed a rainbow around the throne. In Ezekiel's vision of God, he also saw a rainbow (Ezekiel 1:27-28). In his vision Ezekiel spoke of this rainbow as representing the radiance or glory of the One he saw seated on the throne.

Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1:28)

It is important to note that the rainbow in the Old Testament also represented the covenant the Lord God made with Noah (Genesis 9). Every time the rainbow appeared in the sky the people of God were reminded of their covenant with God. The rainbow around the throne was a reminder of the faithfulness of the One seated on the throne to keep His covenant.

There were twenty-four elders surrounding the throne. These elders were dressed in white and wore crowns of gold. The number twenty-four is significant. Do these twenty-four men seated on their thrones represent the

heads of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the New Testament? If this is the case, they represent the people of God in both the Old and the New Testament.

The fact that these elders are dressed in white shows us that they had overcome. The Lord told the church in Sardis that the one who overcame would be dressed in white (Revelation 3:5). Their white robes symbolized their purity. The fact that they were wearing crowns also shows that they had overcome. The Lord promised the church of Smyrna that the overcomer would receive a crown of life if they were faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10). He also reminded the church in Philadelphia that they were to hold fast to what they had so that no one would take away their crown (Revelation 3:11). The elders had been faithful to the end.

As John watched, he saw flashes of lightening from the throne. He could also hear blasts of thunder. This throne was terrifying to see. In the days of Moses, when the Lord descended on the mountain, it was filled with fire. Lightning and thunder filled the skies. God's presence is awesome. He is a holy God. You cannot approach Him as you would approach any other being. His presence inspired terror and awe.

In front of the throne John noticed seven blazing lamps and a sea of glass. In the temple of the Old Testament, the Lord's presence dwelt in the Ark of the Covenant which was located in the innermost room called the Holy of Holies. Before arriving at the Holy of Holies, the priest would pass by a great basin of water and a lamp stand. The lamp stand, according to Exodus 27:20, was to be constantly burning before the presence of the Lord. The priest was required to wash himself in the basin before entering the

presence of the Holy God of Israel. Could it be that this is what the apostle John saw?

The lamp stand before the presence of God is said to be the seven spirits of God or the sevenfold spirit of God (verse 5). We have already determined that the seven spirits represent the Holy Spirit in His perfection. It is He who illuminates our minds to the things of God. Without Him we would not be able to enter the presence of the Lord or see Him. It is He who gives us light to see Christ.

The sea or basin of glass was as clear as crystal. Here the saints could wash themselves from their sins and impurities before entering the presence of God. The water in this sea was crystal pure. The sea represents the forgiveness and cleansing power of God. The prophet Micah speaks of a sea into which the Lord would cast our sins to remember them no more.

You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19)

In many ways this sea of glass represents the work of the Lord Jesus in bringing us the cleansing and forgiveness of sin. Before approaching the presence of the Holy One seated on the throne, one needed the light of God's Spirit and the cleansing work of His Son.

John noticed four living creatures around the throne. These living creatures were covered with eyes in front and in back. Ezekiel saw the same creatures (Ezekiel 1). Each of these four creatures had a different face. The first was like a lion. The second was like an ox. The third was like a man. The fourth was like an eagle. The beings had six

wings each. They were obviously some form of angelic being. They led the elders in worship. This seems to be their primary responsibility (see Revelation 7:11; 14:3; 19:4).

There is much speculation about the four different faces of these creatures. Suffice it to say that they represent the greatest of all the creation of God. The lion, as the king of the wild beasts, is noted for his strength. The ox, as the king of the domesticated animals, is noted for his hard work. Man, as the head of creation, is noted for his intelligence. Finally, the eagle, as the king of the birds, is noted for his speed. This was a language the apostle John could understand. These beings, though not like the one who was seated on the throne, represent all of God's living creation.

As we have already mentioned, these creatures had, as their most important responsibility, the task of leading in worship. Day and night they would cry out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8).

Whenever these four beings gave glory to the One seated on the throne, the twenty-four elders would bow down in worship. The elders would lay their crowns before the One seated on the throne as a symbol of respect and submission crying out:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. (Revelation 4:11)

They worshipped God as their creator. They owed Him their life. They were created for Him and found their greatest joy in Him. What is true for these elders is also true for

us. We were created for God and will only find our truest meaning and purpose in worshipping and serving Him.

The picture before us is of the glory of the One seated on the throne. Remember that John was exiled because of his faith at this time. The seven churches also were facing persecution and severe difficulty. God still sat on His throne reigning over the universe. All things were created by Him. All things were sustained by Him. He alone was worthy of adoration and praise. When you are facing a struggle like John, take a look at this throne room and remember that the Lord still reigns. Remember that one day you too, if you belong to Him, will be part of that crowd gathered around the throne in worship and adoration. Praise be to Him who sits on the throne.

#### For Consideration:

- What did it mean for John to be "in the Spirit?" Does God still work in this way today?
- What do the stones around the throne of heaven teach us about the character of God?
- What does the rainbow around the throne tell us about God?
- What is the significance of the white robes and the crowns on the heads of the twenty-four elders?
- What do the lampstand and the sea (basin) of water teach us about what the Lord God has done for us so that we can enter His presence?
- What is the central focus of the creatures John saw in his vision? What are they doing as a result?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to encourage you by the truth of this passage. Ask Him to help you to realize that He is still on the throne.
- Thank the Lord for the provision He has made for you to enter His presence through the Holy Spirit and the work of the Lord Jesus to cleanse and forgive.
- Ask God to give you grace to persevere so that you too will be dressed in a white robe and given the crown of life.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that you will one day enter His awesome presence in heaven.



# 11

## THE SCROLL

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Read Revelation 5

The scene is the throne room of heaven. God is seated on His throne. In His right hand is a scroll with writing on both sides. The scroll is sealed with seven seals. We understand from chapter 6 that the scroll contained God's judgment and purposes for the earth. We will examine the contents of the scroll in the next chapter. What is important for us to notice at this point is that the destiny of humanity has been mapped out. It was written in this scroll even before it happened. The unfolding of human history does not depend on us. God has carefully planned our future. What comfort we can take from this?

As John took in the scene before him, he heard the voice of a powerful angel crying out, "Who is worthy to open the book?" No one claimed this honour. There was no one in heaven worthy to unfold the purposes of God for humanity. Neither was there anyone on earth or under the earth who could assume this responsibility.



The reference to those under the earth can be difficult to understand. It may be that those under the earth refers to those who had already died and were buried? It is also possible that this refers to Satan and his angels? What is clear is that there never was, in the history of this world, a leader who could assume the task of opening up the scroll and unfolding the purposes of God for humanity. No human or demon from hell, however powerful they were, has ever been found worthy of judging the world and unfolding God's purposes.

Notice John's reaction when no one could be found to open the scroll. The Bible tells us that he wept and wept. Why would the apostle weep? Some commentators believe that he wept because he felt he would never know what was written in the scroll. I believe, however, that the weeping of John was far deeper than an unsatisfied curiosity. The scroll contained the purposes of God for the world and His judgment against evil. What a sad thing it would be if the purposes of God could not be unfolded and sin and evil were left unpunished because there was no one worthy of the task. If there was no one to conquer evil then our faith is in vain. The apostle's wrestling would have been in vain. Many martyrs would have died in vain. Many lives would have been lived in vain. All would be futile if, after living my life for the Lord, I arrived at heaven's gate only to find that the battle had been lost to evil because no one had been found worthy in heaven or earth to accomplish God's purposes. This would be cause for great weeping.

One of the twenty four elders told John not to weep and told him that there was one person who was able to open the seals and unfold the scroll. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, was alone worthy. Our Lord Jesus was the Lion of the tribe of Judah. As a lion, He was a

powerful, conquering king from the line of David of Judah. He had conquered sin and death through His life and work on earth. He alone was worthy of opening the scroll and executing God's purposes on the earth.

As John watched, he saw a Lamb standing in the centre of the throne. This Lamb looked as if he had been slain. He bore the scars of a cruel knife. Our Lord's body still bears the scars of His crucifixion. One day we will see those scars.

Notice also that the Lamb had seven horns. An animal's horn is a weapon. The horn in Scripture is a symbol of power and authority. The number seven represents perfection. The image here is one of a Lamb who has perfect power and authority.

The Lamb also had seven eyes. This is explained to us in verse 6. The seven eyes represent the seven spirits of God. We have already seen that the term "seven spirits" refers to the Holy Spirit. This Lamb was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was also all-knowing and saw everything that happened.

This Lamb took the scroll from the hands of the Father. We cannot underestimate the importance of this ceremony. In taking the scroll from the hands of the Father, Jesus is given authority by the Father to judge the world and execute His purposes on the earth. He alone was found worthy to take this responsibility.

The remainder of the chapter describes for us what took place in heaven the day the scroll was handed over to the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell on their faces and worshipped Him. Notice how they worship the

Lamb. They worship Him with their harps and their prayers.

Verses 9-10 show us the song the elders and the four living creatures sang that day. They praised the Lamb for two reasons. First, they praised Him for His blood that purchased them for God. They had been enslaved to sin. They were bound for an eternity without God. The Lord Jesus died to rescue them from the cruel jaws of Satan.

Secondly the elders worshipped the Lamb, for making them a kingdom of kings and priests. They were given the honour of ruling with Christ and serving Him. What an honour this was. We who know the Lord Jesus Christ have not only been rescued at great cost but we also have been given the honour of serving Him as kings and priests. We are His representatives. We have His authority.

As John listened to this great song of praise, he heard yet another voice joining the elders and living beings in adoration. This voice was the voice of hosts of angels. Thousands and thousands of angels exploded into praise as they listened to the elders and living beings. They could not contain their praise. They, too, cried out, "Worthy is the Lamb to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Strength, wisdom, power, and riches in any other hands would be a dreadful thing. Jesus alone was worthy of all glory and honour and praise.

Soon the earth itself could not contain its praise. It also erupted in worship. As John listened, the earth and the sea joined with heaven's choir and sang to the honour of the Lamb. All of heaven and earth cried out:

To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, forever and ever! (Revelation 5:14)

In heaven the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed down in agreement with the praise of heaven and earth. "Amen," they cry, as they fell down and worshipped. What a glorious vision John saw that day. This was a day for worship and thanksgiving. The Lord Jesus was given authority, by virtue of His death and resurrection, to exercise judgment on the earth and accomplish the purposes of God.

Because of Christ, we have renewed hope. Without Him we would be bound for a dark eternity without God. Our world would be headed for destruction. By His death and resurrection, our Lord Jesus has conquered the foe. He now exercises authority by judging and executing the Father's purposes in the world. The rest of the book of Revelation will reveal to us how He will accomplish this task.

For Consideration:

- What does the scroll represent?
- Why was it such a serious matter that no one could be found in heaven, on earth or beneath the earth to open the seals of the scroll?
- Who alone is worthy of opening the scroll? Why is He alone worthy?
- Who is the Lamb described here in this chapter? What do we learn about Him?

- What is the response of heaven and earth to the handing over of the scroll to the Lord Jesus? Why was this event so significant?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He rules over the events of history. Thank Him that your life is in His hands.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord Jesus for what He has done to bring about your salvation.
- Thank the Lord that He is accomplishing the father's purposes for this world. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have failed to believe that He was in control.

# 12

## THE OPENING OF THE SEALS

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Read Revelation 6

The seals found on the scroll handed to the Lamb are now about to be opened. Each of the four living creatures we met in chapter four takes his turn in calling the apostle to come and witness the opening of a seal. As the seals are opened, certain events unfold on the earth. The meaning of these events is much debated among commentators. I believe that what John saw in Revelation 6 corresponds perfectly with what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. We will interpret Revelation 6 in the light of what Jesus teaches in these two gospels.

When the first seal was ready to be opened, the first of the living creatures called John to come and see what was about to take place. When the Lamb opened the first seal, John saw a white horse. The rider had a bow in his hands. On his head was a crown. He was sent out to conquer. John saw another white horse in Revelation 19. There is no doubt that in Revelation 19 the rider is our Lord Jesus. In Revelation 19 the rider is called Faithful and True. His eyes blaze like a raging fire. He had many crowns on His head. His name was "King of kings and Lord of lords." Is

the rider of Revelation 6 the same as the rider of Revelation 19? Many commentators feel he is. There are, however, some significant differences.

The rider in Revelation 6 rides the same colour horse as our Lord in Revelation 19. He also wears a crown on his head. Notice, however, that the rider of Revelation 19:12 wears not one crown but many crowns. The rider of Revelation 6 does not seem to be as glorious as the one described in Revelation 19. John's description of the rider in Revelation 19 is quite clear. He is struck by the majesty of the rider. This does not seem to be the case in Revelation 6. Is it possible that the white horse comes as a false christ? The Lord is clear in His teaching that in the end times there will be a great turning away from the truth of the gospel. False prophets and false christs will abound seeking to destroy many. It may be that the first horse represents the false prophets who will come in the end times (see Matthew 24:4-5; Luke 21:8-9).

There is another possible interpretation of the white horse here in this chapter. Some commentators see the white horse to be a reference to the proclamation of the gospel in the entire world. Jesus tells us that the good news of the gospel must be preached in all the earth before the end comes (Matthew 24:14). Certainly a sign of the end times is that the good news is spread throughout the world. All nations will have an opportunity to repent before the judgment of the Lord is poured out.

There are two possible interpretations of the first seal. It may be that the rider is a deceiver. He comes to conquer the hearts and minds of men and women by turning them away from God. It is also possible that the rider of the white horse is the good news of the gospel sent out to conquer the hearts of men and women and to turn them to the Lord.

Both these interpretations agree with the teaching of our Lord concerning the end times in Matthew and Luke.

When the second seal was opened, John saw a fiery red horse. The rider of this horse carried a large sword and was given the power to take peace away from the earth. He made people slay one another. Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:6-7 and Luke 21:9 that in the last days we will see an increase in wars and violence. The red horse is the color of fire and blood. He represents the increase of wars and hostilities between nations that we will see as the coming of the Lord approaches.

John saw a black horse when the third seal was opened. The rider of the black horse had a scale in his hand. He cried out as he went, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!" (verse 6).

What is being described here is a great famine. A person would be required to work a full day for a small amount of wheat. Oil and wine were to be protected because they were in short supply. Again, this agrees with what our Lord tells us in Matthew 24:7 and Luke 21:11 where He taught that in the last days there would be an increase of famines all over the world. The black horse represents these famines.

John saw a pale horse when the fourth seal was opened. The name of the rider of this horse was Death. He was followed close behind by another person whose name was Hades. The rider of this pale horse was given the power to destroy one quarter of the earth by sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 24:21 that there would be great tribulation such as the world had never seen before His coming. The days of the end times



will be days of terror and suffering. Many will lose their lives. The pale horse of death represents the suffering and death that will take place in those days.

When the fifth seal is opened, the apostle heard the souls of the saints crying out for vengeance. These were men and women who had been killed because of their stand for the Lord Jesus. They asked the Lord how long it would be before their blood would be avenged. The Lord gave them each a white robe. This robe was promised to the overcomer in Revelation 3:5. The robe symbolized their victory over sin.

The Lord told these saints to wait until the rest of their brothers had been killed and then they would be avenged. There was more suffering to come. More men and women would give their lives for the Lord Jesus Christ and be counted with those that had already died.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:9-10 that, in the last days, many believers will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death. He also taught in Luke 21:16-17 that believers will be betrayed by members of their own family and put to death because of their faith. As the last days approach we can expect to see an increasing hatred of God and His people. We can expect more persecution for the church. The fifth seal reminds us that we must be strong because some of us will need to die for the Lord Jesus.

When the sixth seal was opened there was a great earthquake. The sun turned black. The moon became blood red. Stars fell from the sky. Certain commentators see here a reference to the political situation of the end times. They see the sun, moon and stars to refer to political lead-

ers who will fall or have already fallen. They see the earthquake to refer to the massive confusion that will result from the fall of these leaders.

If we use Matthew 24 and Luke 21 as our basis for interpreting Revelation 6, however, we need not spiritualize these verses. Jesus taught that in the last days we can expect to see physical signs pointing to His return. In Matthew 24:7 He taught that there will be an increase of earthquakes in the earth prior to His return. Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 21:25-28:

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

The prophet Joel prophesied about the coming day of the Lord. He too prophesied that there would be physical signs in the heavens pointing to the return of the Lord. He makes this clear in Joel 2:30-31 when he says:

I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

It seems to me that the best way to understand the sixth seal is to take what the verse says literally. In the last days, before the coming of the Lord, we will see physical signs in the sky indicating that His coming will be soon.

As John watched the unfolding of events precipitated by the opening of the sixth seal, he saw the heavens rolling back like a scroll. When the heavens opened the earth shook. The mountains and islands were moved with the violence of the shaking. The presence of the Lord was about to be revealed.

Notice the reaction of the inhabitants of the earth to these events. The rich and the poor, the masters and the slaves hid themselves in the mountains and caves. They cried out to the rocks to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. What terror fills their heart! All this time they had turned their backs on the Lord. Now He was coming to repay them for their evil deeds. The day of His judgment will be a day of terror and panic.

Are you ready to face these events? Will your commitment to the Lord withstand the trials to come? As believers we are called to overcome. For some of us that overcoming will cost us our lives. As the days of the end approach our perseverance will be seriously tested. Let me close with the exhortation of Hebrews 10:38-39:

But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

May we not be like those who draw back but rather like those who persevere to the saving of their souls.

For Consideration:

- What can we expect as the day of the Lord approaches? What does the opening of the seals bring to the earth?
- Why do you suppose the Lord will allow things to become more difficult for the believer?
- Consider the different seals that were opened here in this chapter. Is there evidence that the end is drawing near?
- What was the reaction of the earth to the opening of the skies? Will you be ready for the day the Lord returns?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is in control of the events of history and that even the persecution of the church is in His hands.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to be able to stand as the day of His return draws near.
- Take a moment to pray for a loved one that has not yet accepted the Lord and His salvation. Ask God to work in their heart to prepare them for His return.



# 13

## THE 144,000 AND THE GREAT MULTITUDE

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Read Revelation 7

Throughout history the Lord has chosen people to be His special servants. When there is a task to be done, God both calls and equips His servants to do that task. After the opening of the sixth seal, John saw four angels. These four angels were holding back the four winds of the earth. In verse 2 we read that these angels had been given power to harm the earth. The four winds seem to represent the judgment of God. For the moment, these angels are holding back this judgment.

A fifth angel appeared in John's vision. He had the seal of the living God and spoke with authority. He told the four angels to hold back the winds of God's wrath until he put a seal on the foreheads of God's true servants. A similar sealing took place in the book of Ezekiel. A man with a writer's inkhorn was commanded by God to go throughout the city and mark the foreheads of those who grieved be-

cause of idolatry (Ezekiel 9:4). Other men were then commanded to go through the city and slaughter those who did not have the mark of the Lord (Ezekiel 9:5).

What was the purpose of the seal? In Ezekiel 9 the seal was for protection. This sealing could be compared to what took place in Egypt. The angel of death passed over the land and killed the firstborn child of all those who were not protected by the lamb's blood painted on their door posts. This interpretation of the sealing of God's people is confirmed in Revelation 9:4 when the locusts come out of the Abyss. The locusts were not allowed to harm those who had the seal of God on their forehead. The seal is to protect God's people in an evil time.

John tells us that the number of those sealed was 144,000. Who are these 144,000? This has been the subject of much debate. While the Bible does not give us a clear answer, it does give us some helpful clues. Notice in verse 4 that they were from all the tribes of Israel. Verses 5-8 go into great detail to describe for us just how many people will be represented from each tribe. There are 12,000 individuals chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel.

Why are only 12,000 chosen from each tribe? It is quite possible that the number twelve has some significance. There were twelve tribes in Israel lead by twelve patriarchs. Our Lord Jesus chose twelve disciples. There are twelve entrances into the celestial city according to Revelation 21. In chapter 6 we saw that there were twenty-four elders (two groups of twelve). The number 144,000 is 12,000 times 12,000 or twelve twelves. It is quite obvious that the number twelve is significant in the Scriptures. Some take the number 144,000 to be symbolic in nature and not literal.

Revelation 14 tells us more about the 144,000 who were to be sealed. In Revelation 14:1 we see that the name of the Father was written on the foreheads of the 144,000. This tells us that they belonged to God and were under His protection. They were followers of the Lamb. They had been redeemed or purchased from among men (14:4). They were blameless (14:5).

Because John goes to great lengths in Revelation 7:4-8 to list the specific tribes of Israel from which the 144,000 came we could assume that these individuals have Jewish ancestry. What is important in this passage is that a select group, ultimately known only to God, is set apart and protected after the sixth seal is opened. These individuals are protected because they will go through a time of great trial and difficulty. They will be protected from the wrath that is to be poured out on the earth.

From Revelation 14 we understand that this 144,000 would be faithful to God to the end. Though God was about to pour out His wrath on the earth, He would not leave it without witnesses. The 144,000 belong to the Lord and will shine brightly for Him in a time of great confusion and tribulation. Their presence is a witness to the compassion and grace of God who does not leave sinners without a witness.

When the sealing of the 144,000 had been completed, John noticed a multitude that no one could count. These people were from every tribe and nation. Notice the distinction between the 144,000 that came from specific tribes of Israel and the great multitude from every nation. This may be another indication that the 144,000 are Jews.

The multitude from every tribe and nation was dressed in white. They held palm branches in their hands. We have



already seen that the overcomer was dressed in a white robe (see Revelation 3:5). The palm branch was a symbol of victory. Notice that while these individuals had overcome they do not credit themselves with this victory. In verse 10 they proclaim that their salvation came from the Lamb who sat on the throne. This was the Lamb who had been slain in Revelation 5:6 --the Lord Jesus. The multitude that gathered proclaimed that their salvation was all because of the Lord Jesus and His work. Their victory was from Him.

The angels of heaven, along with the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures joined with the multitude in praise. They too fell down on their faces and worshipped the Lamb.

As John surveyed the scene before him he was left somewhat confused. We are not the only ones to wonder as to the significance of all the details of this chapter. John himself struggled to understand what he saw in this powerful vision. In particular, John did not understand what this multitude represented. We need to remember that, while the gospel had spread during the days of the apostles, it had certainly not spread to every language and nation. To see people from every tribe and nation praising God was something very difficult for John to imagine at this point in history.

One of the elders, understanding John's confusion, spoke to him. He explained that this multitude had come out of the great tribulation. While it is not clearly stated in the passage, the context would lead us to believe that these individuals had suffered for their faith. The elder told John that these individuals would no longer have to go hungry and thirsty. Never again would the scorching rays of the sun beat on them. The Lamb, would be their shepherd. He

would care for them. He would lead them to living waters. Never again would tears and sorrow be their portion. The Lamb would wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The picture painted for us here by the elder is one of intense suffering. Though this multitude had suffered for their faith, they were overcomers. When the fifth seal was opened the souls of the martyrs cried out to God: "How long before you avenge our blood" (Revelation 6:10) The Lord responded by telling them that they would be avenged when the number of those who were to be killed was completed. Is it possible that these men and women were, at least in part, what the Lord was referring to when the fifth seal was opened? Did these individuals complete the number of those who would be killed for their faith?

While the 144,000 would be protected during this time of great tribulation, their task would not be easy. It is sometimes easier to die for one's faith than to continue suffering. While a great multitude was ushered into the presence of God in heaven, the task of the 144,000 was not yet complete.

We discover here in this chapter that there are great difficulties yet to be faced. Some are chosen to die for their faith and pass on into the presence of the Lord God. Others are chosen to remain and be a light to a dying and decaying world under the judgment of God. The choice of who would pass on to eternity and who would remain was the Lord's. In either case, God's people, whether by life or death, were called to bring Him glory by being faithful to the end.

## For Consideration:

- As we begin this chapter we see the angels of God holding back His judgment. What comfort do you take from this?
- Why were the 144,000 sealed? What appears to be their role as the judgment of God is unleashed on the earth?
- While the 144,000 were sealed and protected it appears from the passage that a great multitude from many nations suffered and passed into the presence of God. What does this teach us about God's purpose and plan?
- John has a hard time understanding the identity of the multitude of people from every tribe and nations praising the Lord. It is easier for us to understand this today. How has the gospel spread from the time of John to our day?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He holds back His judgment for a time.
- Thank the Lord that He has a purpose for our lives. Ask Him to give you strength to stand firm in that purpose.
- Thank the Lord that your salvation is complete because of Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is expanding His kingdom around the world. Thank Him for how the message of the gospel has reached your nation.

# 14

## THE SEVENTH SEAL AND THE SOUNDING OF THE TRUMPETS

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Read Revelation 8:1-9:21

When the six seals were opened, terrible things took place on the earth. Deception, war, famine, plague, persecution of Christians, and signs in the sky were all the result of the opening of the first six seals. We compared this to Jesus' teaching in Matthew and Luke where He clearly taught that these things would happen before He returned.

Before the seventh seal was opened, the Lord set apart and sealed 144,000 chosen servants. Tribulation would intensify. While these servants would pass through the tribulation period, they would be kept by God's hand. This judgment continues to intensify as we move through the book of Revelation.

When the seventh seal is opened there is silence in heaven for a period of half an hour. What does this silence

represent? This is the type of silence you expect when something awesome is about to happen. It is a silence of anticipation. All minds are focused on the event about to take place. This is no time for casual conversation.

In the silence, seven angels took their places. Each angel had a trumpet in hand. These trumpets would announce a particular judgment on the earth. An eighth angel appeared with a golden censer in his hand. The censer released incense into the air. The incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the golden altar and presented itself to God. In Revelation 6:10 when the fifth seal was opened the saints under the altar cried out:

How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you  
judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our  
blood?

The Lord told them that when the number of their brothers who would join them had been completed, then He would avenge their blood. In Revelation 7 we meet a great multitude from every tribe and nation standing before the throne of the Lamb. These men and women came through great persecution into the presence of the Lord. They seem to complete this number. Now is the time for the Lord to avenge the blood of His saints.

The angel took the censer filled with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. The result was thunder, lightning, and a great earthquake. The Lord was ready to judge the world in response to the prayers of His saints. Truth and holiness would triumph.

The first angel sounded his trumpet. When the trumpet sounded, hail mixed with blood was hurled down to the earth. The result was devastating. One third of the earth

## The Seventh Seal and the Sounding of the Trumpets 89

was burned up. One third of the trees and grass were consumed. Apart from the flood of Noah's day, the earth has never seen such massive destruction. One can only imagine the consequences of this devastation on the economy of the earth.

The second trumpet followed close behind. When it sounded, a huge object was cast into the sea. John did not know what this object was, except to say that it looked like a huge mountain ablaze with fire. We can imagine in our day a great meteorite or something of this nature falling from the sky. The Bible tells us that one third of the sea turned to blood. One third of the ships found on the sea were destroyed. A third of the sea creatures perished in the contaminated waters. We can only imagine the diseases that the death of these sea creatures would bring and the toll the contamination of the oceans would have on the earth.

When the third trumpet was sounded a great star fell from the sky. The name of this star was "Wormwood." Wormwood is a very bitter substance. This star infected the water supplies of the earth. Rivers and streams were contaminated. One third of the earth's drinking water was infected. Many people died as a result.

The fourth trumpet sounded and the skies were struck. One third of the light of the sun was snuffed out. The moon reflected one third less of the sun. The stars were affected in the same way. Added to all of the above plagues was this horrible darkness that engulfed the inhabitants of the earth.

When the fourth trumpet sounded, a great eagle announced the sounding of the next three trumpets. Why this

special announcement? We have only to look at what was about to take place to see that the next trumpets were far worse than the first four. The eagle or the angel (King James Version) announced an intensification of judgment on the earth.

When the fifth trumpet is sounded, John saw a star falling from the sky. We do not know what this star represents. We do know, however, that the star was given a key to a bottomless pit. Revelation 1:18 tells us that it was the Lord Jesus who held the keys of death and hell. While we cannot necessarily assume that this star represents the Lord Jesus, we must understand that these keys have been handed over to the star by the authority of the Lamb of God.

The person with the key opened up the door to the bottomless pit. We have already caught a glimpse of heaven through John's vision. John now gives us a brief glimpse of hell. When the door was opened, smoke rose from the depths like the smoke of a great furnace. The smoke was so thick it darkened the sky, covering the already reduced light of the sun.

From the pit came a swarm of locusts. These locusts are not normal locusts. Their sting was like the sting of a scorpion. It was very painful, though it would not kill. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. They had what appeared to be golden crowns on their head. Their hair was long like a woman's hair. Their teeth were as destructive as the teeth of a lion. They wore iron breast plates. They were well protected. There was no question of destroying them. Their tails, like the tails of scorpions had the power to torment. As they swarmed the earth the sound of their wings is described to be like the sound of many chariots rushing into battle. These locusts charged

## The Seventh Seal and the Sounding of the Trum- 91 pets

against their enemy. Their leader was called Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. Both words mean "destroyer."

These locusts were limited in power. They were not to harm the trees or the grass. This was the normal food of locusts. They were not normal locusts. These creatures were not allowed to touch those who had been sealed. We have already seen that the 144,000 were sealed by the angel in Revelation 7. They are still on the earth at this time. They were not affected by these locusts. The illustration is very similar to what took place in Egypt. While the land of Egypt suffered tremendously under the ten plagues, the land of Goshen, where the people of God lived, was completely sheltered from these attacks (Exodus 9:25-26).

The locusts from the pit were only to afflict those who were not sealed. They were not given the power to kill them. They did, however, inflict tremendous pain. The Bible tells us that those afflicted by these locusts would seek death, but death would not come.

This terrible torture would continue for five months. Commentators tell us that five months is the life span of a locust. The idea here is that the torture was limited. While it would be extremely intense it was only for a short time.

Other than the description we have here, we know nothing more about these locusts. They are clearly demonic in origin. They are set free to wreak havoc on the inhabitants of the earth. They cause tremendous physical suffering. God will use them to judge unbeliever for their sin. These days will be filled with torment and terror.



When the sixth trumpet was sounded, a voice from the altar in heaven commanded the sixth angel to unleash the four angels of the Euphrates River. These angels may be the angels referred to in Revelation 7:2 who were holding back the judgment of God. These angels were set free for the purpose of destroying humankind. These angels had an army of two hundred million soldiers. They would kill one third of all humanity.

Notice the description of the horses and riders. The riders wore breast plates of red, blue and yellow. We can only speculate as to the meaning of these colors. The horses they rode were quite peculiar. The heads of these horses were like lions. They were ferocious. Fire, smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths. Many commentators see this as a reference to some sort of war engine shooting bullets or missiles. Time alone will reveal their true identity.

There was certainly nothing in John's day that could match this description. The tails of these horses were extremely dangerous. The tails, like snakes, bit those with whom they came into contact. As has been already mentioned, one third of all of humanity was killed by these engines of war. We can only speculate here as to the exact identity of this army and its weapons. What we do know is that difficult times are yet to come. The judgment of the Lord will be very real and very intense. Many people will perish when God unleashes his wrath on the earth.

What is important for us to note here is that in spite of what was happening all around them, the inhabitants of the earth did not repent of worshipping demons and idols (verses 20-21). They refused to repent of their murders, magic, immorality and theft. They were unresponsive to the judgment of God on the earth. They hardened their heart to God and His voice.

## The Seventh Seal and the Sounding of the Trumpets 93

Revelation 9:20-21 is one of the most powerful statements about the hardness of the human heart found anywhere in the Bible. What will it take to break the hard heart of the unbeliever? The earth was being consumed. Terror and devastation reigned all around. These men and women, however, refuse to turn their hearts to the Lord.

May I remind you that, but for the grace of God, you and I would be among that crowd. Praise be to Christ who has called us out of our rebellion. Eternity itself will not be sufficient to praise Him for rescuing us.

What we read here is only the beginning of the judgment of God on the earth. Do you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour? Listen to the sound of the trumpets in this chapter. See the terrible judgment of God unfold as each trumpet sounds. Do not remain in your sin. Don't be like the hardened unbelievers of Revelation 9. Turn to the Lord now before it is too late.

### For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the judgment of God that will come on the earth? What will be the result of this judgment on the earth's economy and people?
- What do we learn in this passage about God's hatred of sin and rebellion? How should this impact how we live for Him each day?
- What is the response of the inhabitants of the earth to the terrible judgment of God? What do you suppose it would take for the hard-hearted unbeliever to

be broken? How did God break your heart and soften it?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He will deal with sin and rebellion.
- Thank the Lord that He softened your heart.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to face what is ahead. Ask for strength to remain faithful.
- Thank the Lord that He has forgiven you and that despite what happens here on this earth you have a bright future ahead in His presence.

# 15

## THE ANGEL AND THE SCROLL

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Read Revelation 10

Before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, John saw an angel descending from heaven. John describes five characteristics of the angel in this chapter. Each of these characteristics is associated with John's earlier description of the Lord.

We see first that this angel is dressed in a cloud. From Revelation 1:7 we see that when the Lord Jesus comes again He will come in the clouds. Like Jesus, this angel descends from heaven in a cloud.

Second, the angel has a rainbow above his head. The rainbow was a sign of the covenant God made with Noah. When John first caught a glimpse of the throne room of heaven, he saw God seated on the throne with a rainbow encircling it (Revelation 4:3). The angel that came down from heaven reflects the glory of a covenant keeping God.

John tells us that the face of this angel was like the sun. This is exactly how the apostle described the one who was standing among the lampstands in Revelation 1:16. His face shone with the radiance of the sun. It was impossible to look into His face.

The angel's legs were also like fiery pillars. Revelation 1:15 tells us that the one standing among the lampstands had feet like brass "as if they burned in the furnace."

Notice finally that the angel held an open scroll in his hand. Is it possible that the scroll mentioned here is the same scroll John saw being handed over to the Lamb in Revelation 5? Each of the seven seals had been opened and now the scroll itself had been unfolded. Its message had been revealed to the world. It would seem to me that the Lord Jesus alone would fit the description of this angel.

The angel placed one foot on the land and the other on the sea. This is obviously a symbol of his dominion over both the land and the sea. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Lord over all. With his feet firmly planted, the angel cried out with a loud lion like roar. From the context we see that this roar calls forth seven thunders.

The number seven occurs often in the book of Revelation. We have examined the opening of the seven seals. We are now examining the seven trumpets. Later in the book of Revelation we will encounter the seven bowls. Here in this chapter we read about the seven thunders.

John was about to write down what he had seen and heard but the angel told him that he was not to reveal it. The seven thunders were to remain sealed to humanity. Why the Lord felt free to reveal these thunders to John and not to the rest of humanity we do not know.

After the seven thunders had announced their judgments on the earth, the angel raised his right hand and took an oath. The raising of the right hand while giving an oath was a common practice. He swore by God, who created the heavens and the earth, that there would be no more delay in the accomplishing of the final judgments.

This oath tells us something important about the angel. In James 5:12 we are warned about taking oaths lest we not be able to fulfill them:

Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

The angel took the oath because he is assured of victory. Notice that the angel says that there would be no more delay in the judgment of God and the unfolding of his purpose. This is a powerful statement. The angel who made this statement is a powerful being. What ordinary angel in heaven could say this? God alone is the controller of time and circumstances. The angels of heaven are his servants. They wait on his time. To Christ alone was given the power to unfold the plan of God. He alone could determine that there would be no more delay.

This angel announced that the mystery of God would be accomplished. This seventh trumpet would usher in the final phase of God's triumph over sin and Satan. It would see the victory of the Lamb over Satan. It would bring in the final triumph of the kingdom of God foretold by the prophets of old.

As John watched the scene before him, a voice called to him from heaven. It commanded him to take the scroll from

the hands of the angel. In obedience to this command, John approached the angel and asked him for the scroll. He did not casually approach him. He approached him with great awe and reverence.

The angel told John to take the book and eat it. This John did. The scroll was sweet in the mouth but turned sour when he swallowed it.

When we eat something it becomes part of us. John was to take the words of God and apply them to his own life.

Notice that the word John ate was sweet. The Word of God is the most beautiful message ever recorded. It tells us of the love of God for us. It records the story of Jesus and His death on our behalf. There is not a sweeter message.

Anyone who accepts the sweet message of the gospel, however, knows that the sweet message of the gospel also has its bitter reality. The Bible clearly tells us that we will be hated for the cause of Christ. He who accepts the Lord Jesus Christ must take up his cross. This cross is not an easy load to bear.

The apostle John was called to accept the bitter sweet message of the Word of God. He was to then take that word and share it with others. He was to prophecy about "many peoples, nations, tongues and kings" (Revelation 10:11). He was to share the things that the Lord Jesus had revealed to him. These words would not always be accepted. There would be people who would not listen to this word. He was to share it anyway. This was an important word that spoke about the destiny of many nations.

Here in this chapter we see how events are shaping up for an even greater judgment of God on the earth. The angel's announcement that there would be no more delay would usher in an even greater judgment on the earth.

For Consideration:

- What are the five characteristics of the angel of the Lord who came down from heaven in this chapter? What do these characteristics tell us about the identity of the angel?
- Why do you suppose the Lord refused to reveal the seven thunders to us? Does everything God shows us need to be revealed to others? Does God reveal things that are only for us personally?
- We see here that there is a time coming when there will be no more delay in God's judgment. Why do you suppose God holds off on judging the earth now?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider how God has spoken to you personally and revealed things about Himself to you. Thank Him for this.
- God revealed some things to John that he did not want him to reveal to others. Ask God to help you to know what He wants you to share with others and what is for you alone.
- Thank God that the day will come when He will judge the earth. Ask Him to help you to be ready for that day. Thank Him that because of Christ, you have assurance to face that day.





# 16

## THE TWO WITNESSES

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Read Revelation 11:1-14

God's wrath is tempered with mercy. Every opportunity is given for the sinner to repent. Until the very end God calls sinners to Himself giving them an opportunity to repent. We see here in this book of Revelation that even as His wrath is poured out, God pleads with those He is punishing to turn to Him and be saved. He does not delight in destroying sinners. He longs that they come to repentance and forgiveness.

In His vision John is given a measuring rod to measure the temple of God and the altar. The apostle was also to count the number of worshippers found in the temple. Most commentators agree that the measuring of the temple is for protection. It is a staking out of territory. The enemy does not have the right to trespass on the territory measured. The worshippers are counted so that none will be lost. From the context, we see that they are gathered in the presence of the Lord in the temple.

While the temple of the Lord is measured, notice that the outer court was not measured. It was given over to the Gentiles. The picture here is an Old Testament picture. The Jews were the chosen people of God. The Gentiles were pagans and unbelievers. Notice here that the outer court of the temple was given over to these unbelieving Gentiles. We are told that they would trample the holy city for forty-two months.

What is taking place here? We have a picture of a great persecution in the land. The unbeliever has penetrated into the holy city and the outer court of the temple. The people of God are restrained to the inner court where God's presence was revealed. While the worshippers are restrained they are safe. All around them the unbeliever is trampling on the holy things of God. Blasphemy and profanity abound. The unbeliever is free to do as he pleases. Evil and sin are everywhere.

Notice that this evil will take place for forty-two months (three and a half years). It is important to note here that the Lord has set a time on this sinful activity. He is still in control.

When the time was right, the Lord sent two witnesses into this chaos. These witnesses were clothed in sackcloth. They mourned the state of the world. They reminded unbelievers of their evil ways and called them to repent. They prophesied for 1260 days. One thousand two hundred and sixty days is forty-two months or three and a half years. These witnesses will prophecy for the same amount of time as evil was allowed to reign. The people who trampled the holy city and blasphemed the Lord are given every chance to repent.

What is the identity of these two witnesses? The Bible does not tell us who they are. This remains hidden. Only time will tell. The identity of these witnesses is not important to the understanding of the passage. Verse 4 tells us that these witnesses are the two olive trees and two lamp stands that stand before the Lord. This illustration comes from Zechariah 4. In a vision the prophet Zechariah saw two golden lamp stands. These lamps provided an unlimited supply of oil from two olive trees by means of two golden pipes. Oil in Scripture often represents the work of the Holy Spirit. This picture John saw tells us that the two witnesses would be empowered by the Spirit of God to do the work they had been called to do. As lights to the world they would be empowered by God's Spirit to shine brightly for their God in this evil time.

Notice the power the Lord gave the two witnesses. They had power to shut the heavens so that it would not rain. They could turn water into blood. They could strike the earth with whatever plague they desired. If their enemies sought to harm them, the witnesses would consume them with a fire that came from their mouth. God specifically gifted and empowered them for this important work.

When they had finished their prophetic task, a beast from the Abyss (bottomless pit, KJV), would attack and overpower them. This could only happen when their ministry had been completed. The enemy had no power over them until they had finished the work the Lord had for them. This ought to be an encouragement to us all in our service for the Lord as well.

The bodies of the two witnesses would lie in the streets of the great city. The name of this city is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt. The passage tells us that this was the city in which their Lord was crucified. Sodom and Egypt

were both known for their evil. In the days of Abraham, Sodom was destroyed because of its evil. Egypt was the land of bondage and slavery for God's people. It was the Egyptians who chased after the people of God to destroy them when they were first released from their slavery. Sodom and Egypt represent cities of sin. The place where our Lord was crucified was actually Jerusalem but here it is called Sodom and Egypt because of the sin in its midst.

The bodies of these two witnesses lay in the streets of the great city. For three and a half days people would gaze on the bodies of these prophets. They would not be buried. There would be a joyous celebration. Men and women would send gifts to one another in celebration of the death of the two witnesses.

The world hated the witnesses because they had tormented them. A godly presence in their midst made them uneasy. These witnesses had the power to cause plagues and shut up the skies. They had done this to convince men and women of their sin, but they would not listen. Instead their God-given power was hated and despised. When they died, the unbeliever celebrated.

After three and a half days God breathed life into the dead bodies of these two witnesses. They rose to their feet. Those who saw them were terrified. As the world gazed in horror at the risen witnesses, they heard a voice from heaven. It called out to the witnesses. In the presence of the enemy, the witnesses ascended to heaven in a cloud.

When the witnesses ascended into heaven, the earth quaked. One tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people perished in the earthquake. The survivors recognized the greatness of the power of God and gave glory to

His name. In death these witnesses accomplished more than in life.

After these things had been accomplished, John heard an angel cry out, "The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon" (verse 14). To understand this we need to return to Revelation 8:13. Here the angel (eagle, NIV) warned the earth of the last three trumpet blasts. What we read here in chapter eleven is the second of the last three trumpet blasts. The third and final blast is now to be sounded.

What are we to make of this section? One of the greatest temptations in the interpretation of the book of Revelation is to speculate as to the identity of each character and event. How nice it would be to know who these two witnesses will be. All we know about them, however, is recorded for us in this chapter. God has chosen to hide their identity from us. What is important for us to understand is that during the end times, while the judgment of the Lord on the earth is severe, He will continue to call the sinner to repent. God will give the sinner every chance to repent. The 144,000 and the two witnesses are reminders of God's patience with humanity. Through them, God continues to call the sinner to repent and be saved.

As for God's people, they have been counted like the shepherd counts his sheep. They will be kept through the terrible persecution that takes place around them. The Good Shepherd will see to it that none of them will be lost.

## For Consideration:

- We begin this chapter with a picture of unbelievers taking over the holy city and blaspheming the Lord God. While these will be difficult days, God's people are protected and kept by God. What encouragement do you find in this?
- The two witnesses of this chapter were given tremendous power yet they would die at the hands of the evil one when they had accomplished all that God wanted them to do. What reassurance does this give you in your service for the Lord?
- Despite the tremendous power of the two witnesses, the people of their day rejected them and ultimately killed them. What does this tell us about the hardness of the unbelieving heart? Does God force people to accept Him and His offer of forgiveness?
- What do we learn here about the patience of God toward sinners?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to face the difficult times that are yet to come.
- Thank God for His tremendous patience with sinners.
- Thank God that your life is in His hands and that He will not allow you to face more than you can handle in His power.

# 17

## THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

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Read Revelation 11:15-19

At the sounding of the seventh trumpet heaven bursts into praise and adoration. The judgment of the Lord was about to be unleashed on the unbelieving world. When the trumpet sounded, John heard voices in heaven. While we do not know where these voices came from, John tells us that they were very loud.

The voices reminded those present that the kingdom of this world had become the kingdom of our Lord. Did this world not belong to our Lord from the beginning? Why do the voices tell us that it had become His kingdom? To understand this we need to realize that while God created the world, the people He created wandered from Him into sin, giving Satan and sin power over them. Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sin. By His death and resurrection, He claimed back from Satan what was rightfully His. Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, the kingdom of God is now expanding throughout this world.



Men and women are surrendering daily to the Lordship of Christ.

What we need to understand, however, is that the kingdom of God is expanding in the midst of evil and darkness. The kingdom of evil is still evident in our midst. With the sounding of the final trumpet, all the efforts of the enemy will be destroyed. The Lordship of Christ would be revealed to the world and evil crushed.

The second statement of the voices in heaven reminded those present that the Lord would reign for ever and ever. The Lord has always reigned over this world. He has always been sovereignly watching over the history of humanity. This is not what the voices are speaking about. These voices proclaim the beginning of the final and glorious reign of Christ. This is the reign that will take place when Satan and evil are finally conquered. This will be a reign of peace and godliness over the entire world.

Notice that this reign would be a reign without end. Righteousness will prevail. Nothing will ever bring an end to this reign of Christ. What a glorious day that will be. Imagine a world with no sin. Imagine a world where the Lord Jesus reigns supreme. The day is coming when this will become reality. We can understand why the voices in heaven burst into praise. Thinking about that day should cause us to join the voices of heaven in praise and adoration of our great Lord.

When the twenty-four elders of heaven heard this voice they fell on their faces and worshipped. They worshipped the Lord for who He was and what He had done. Let's consider this in greater detail.

The elders worshipped the Lord Jesus for who He was. Notice what their praise tells us about the Lord Jesus. First, He is the Lord. As Lord He is the sovereign ruler of all. He is the one through whom all things must pass. Second, He is God, the creator and sustainer of all. He is the source of all life. Third, He is Almighty. There is nothing impossible for Him. He is the conqueror of evil and death. Finally, He was the one who is and who was. He always was and always will be. He had no beginning, nor will He have an end. The elders fell on their faces in adoration of this great and awesome God.

The elders also worship the Lord Jesus for what He had done. Verse 17 tells us that He had taken His great power and begun to reign. He was now claiming His Lordship over evil and Satan. Up to this point the enemy had been very active. His days were now numbered. With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the Lord moved out in His final assault against the enemy to claim His rightful possession. The nations had been angry. They had unleashed their fury on the church. They had enjoyed their day of victory. Now, however, their end had come. The holy wrath of God was now to fall on them. This was the time for judgment.

Not only was this a time for the judging of evil, but this was also a time for rewarding those who had overcome. God's servants would stand before Him to receive their reward. They had been victorious to the end. They had run a good race. Together they would celebrate the defeat of the enemy. Never would there be a victory celebration like this one. What a glorious occasion this will be.

As John watched the twenty four elders in worship, he saw the temple of God in heaven. The Holy of Holies was opened and John saw the Ark of the Covenant. It was over

the cover of this Ark that God revealed Himself in Old Testament times. God was now revealing Himself to the world. John saw lightning and hail. There was an earthquake, and the sound of thunder coming from heaven. The God who revealed Himself in the Ark of the Covenant was a great and holy God. His presence inspired fear and awe. He was about to move on the earth.

#### For Consideration:

- This section of Revelation gives praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is and for what He has done. Who is God to you? What has He done for you?
- What do the voices of this passage tell us about God and who He is?
- For what do the twenty-four elders in this passage worship God? What does this tell us about Him and His work on our behalf?
- This passage tells us that the kingdom of God would come in its fullness after the sounding of the trumpet. While the kingdom of God is among us, it has not yet been revealed in its fullness. What evidence is there of the presence of the kingdom of God today in this world?

#### For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the various attributes of God as seen here in this passage. Thank the Lord for who He is and what He has done.
- Thank the Lord for the assurance of victory for His kingdom.

- Thank the Lord for evidence of His kingdom already on this earth. Thank Him that the day is coming when that kingdom will be fully revealed.



## 18

# THE WOMAN, THE CHILD AND THE DRAGON

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Read Revelation 12

One of the most glorious truths of the Bible is that we are overcomers through our Lord Jesus Christ. We will face many obstacles in this life. Some of us will suffer great things for His sake. While these struggles are inevitable, victory is assured for all who trust in Him. Our enemy is already defeated. Though he lashes out against us, his end is near.

In chapter twelve John takes us back in time. John saw a woman in his vision. The apostle noticed several things about this woman. She was clothed with the sun. She stood on the moon and wore a crown of twelve stars on her head. John also noticed that she was pregnant.

The imagery of Genesis 37:9-10 is very similar to what we see here in chapter 12. In his dream, Joseph saw the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. He told

this dream to his father Jacob. Jacob immediately understood the significance of the dream. Listen to his interpretation in Genesis 37:10:

When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?

In Joseph's dream, the sun, moon and the stars represented the nation of Israel. It is very likely this woman clothed with the sun and standing on the moon is the nation of Israel. The fact that she is clothed in the sun and standing on the moon shows that she is a glorious woman. The twelve stars in her crown likely represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

John also saw a great dragon in his vision. This dragon was red in color and very large. He had seven heads and ten horns. There were seven crowns on his head. What does this description tell us about the dragon? He is a very powerful creature. The horns represent his power. Could it be that his bloody red color indicates that he is a murderous creature? Revelation 17:9-10 also speaks about a scarlet (red) beast with seven heads and ten horns. The interpretation of the seven heads is given to us in this passage.

This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.

The seven heads therefore are seven political powers controlled by the dragon.

The identity of this dragon is given to us in Revelation 12:9. He is the devil. What we have before us here is a graphic description of Satan. He is a powerful dragon who controls certain political leaders (represented by the heads). Satan reveals his power and rebellion through these different political leaders. These heads are not identified for us. It is not hard to see, however, that throughout the history of Israel and the church Satan has used political leaders in his attempt to destroy the work of God.

Notice that the tail of the dragon swept across the sky and flung one third of the stars to the earth. Some commentators believe that this is a reference to the fallen angels. In chapter 1 the seven stars represented the angels of the seven churches. It is possible therefore that the fallen stars are fallen angels. When Satan rebelled against God he was not alone. Many angels in heaven also rebelled against God and followed Satan. These are known today as demons or evil spirits. The falling of the stars could represent the rebellion of Satan's followers in heaven and how they were cast down to the earth.

The dragon and his angels had a particular objective in mind. He stood in front of the woman, Israel, who was about to give birth so he could destroy her child.

Who was the child the woman Israel was to deliver? We understand from the context that the child was to rule the nations with an iron rod. Revelation 2:27 tells us that the overcomer would rule over the nations with a rod of iron even as Christ ruled. It is very likely that the child mentioned here is the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ was born, Satan used the influence of Herod in his attempt to



kill Him. Is it possible that Herod was one of the heads represented on the dragon?

Satan, the dragon, was not successful in killing our Lord Jesus. While he did succeed in using yet another political leader by the name of Pilate to release Jesus over to be crucified, Jesus was not defeated. He rose from the dead. Revelation 12:5 tells us that the child was "snatched up to God and to his throne." This confirms the identity of the child. Only Christ could sit on the throne of God. Our Lord Jesus rose from the dead and now sits on His heavenly throne.

After the ascension of Christ to heaven the dragon turned his attention to the woman. Notice, however, that before the dragon could destroy her, the woman was taken away to the desert where she would be protected for a period of 1260 days. This seems to be a repetition of what took place in chapter eleven. We have already seen that the people of God were measured and closed within the temple for protection for a period of forty two months (1260 days).

While the woman was being protected, John noticed a great war going on in heaven. The angels of heaven fought Satan and his demons. Satan was not strong enough and was cast out of heaven onto the earth. While there was great rejoicing in heaven, the earth would suffer tremendously because of Satan's presence.

Satan is described in verse 10 as the accuser of the brethren. He accused them day and night before God. We need not lose hope, however. He has been overcome in heaven and he will be overcome on earth. Notice how this takes place. He is overcome by the power of the blood of the

Lamb (verse 11). The blood of Christ renders Satan powerless. He may accuse you day and night before God but his accusations are to no avail if you are covered by the blood of the Lamb. Every sin we ever committed or ever will commit is covered by the blood of Christ. There is complete forgiveness and pardon in Christ. Satan can hurl his accusations at us, but they have all been forgiven. This is cause for great rejoicing.

Satan is also overcome by our commitment to the Lord. The saints of old refused to shrink back even from death. It is important that we be covered by the blood of Christ. That does not give us an excuse to do as we please. We must live a life of faith. This requires much effort. The overcomer, spoken of in Revelation 12, had to die for the cause of Christ. They overcame the devil by persevering in truth.

Satan was hurled down to earth. He had not succeeded in killing the Christ child. He had not succeeded in his rebellion against God in heaven. The promise here in this chapter is that he will not succeed in his effort against the church. We can overcome him by the blood of Christ and our perseverance in the truth. How frustrated he must be in his futile efforts to destroy the work of God.

Satan's defeats do not discourage him in his endeavour to destroy the work of God. Knowing that his time is short, Satan will not spare his effort. He will seek to do as much damage as possible to the work of God.

The dragon attacked the woman. We have seen that this woman represented Israel. Verse 14 seems to repeat the teaching of verse 6 by telling us that the woman was given two wings to fly away to a desert location to be protected by God for a "time, and times, and half a time." What does

this reference to "time" mean? Most commentators understand "time" to refer to a symbolic year. "Times" is more than one year and likely refers to two years. "A half time" refers to half a year. If this is the meaning of "time" then by adding one year and two years and half a year you get three and a half years. Three and a half years is forty-two months or 1260 days. This is the period mentioned in verse six. We have also seen that this is the same time frame as mentioned in chapter eleven.

What is important for us to note here is that the Lord was going to protect His people during the time that Satan was unleashed on the earth. The persecution was limited in time. Verse 15 tells us that the dragon spewed water out of his mouth so as to devour the woman. What is this water? The Bible does not tell us. We can be assured, however, that this water represented difficulty, trials, and persecution for the church that remained on the earth at this time. The churches of John's day were experiencing this water of persecution spit out of the mouth of Satan. The attention of Satan is focused solely on the destruction of the church. Were it not for the protective hands of God, the church would surely have perished during this time.

Again, however, the efforts of Satan are frustrated. The water he spewed out of his mouth is swallowed up by the earth. God's hand was keeping His people. The gates of hell would not prevail against His people. The dragon, frustrated in his endeavours, went off to make war with the rest of the offspring of the woman. The offspring is described for us in verse 17 as those who obey the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Christ. We are that offspring.

Satan's war here is with God's people. What difficult days these will be for the believer left on the earth. God will not

abandon them, however. They will be kept by the loving and protecting hand of God. Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ. Victory is ours as we persevere by His blood.

For Consideration:

- Who is the woman clothed in the sun in this passage? What does the fact that she is clothed in the sun tell us about how God sees her?
- Who is the dragon and what was is his purpose?
- Who is the child born to the woman and how does he overcome?
- When the dragon could not defeat the child he turns his attention to the woman. How does God protect her?
- Who are the other offspring of the woman and what is God's promise for them?
- What confidence can we have from this passage?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He watches over you personally and keeps you from the efforts of Satan to defeat you.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to defeat the power of Satan. Thank Him that He will give you victory over every effort of Satan to defeat you.



# 19

## THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA

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Read Revelation 13:1-10

There is much debate over the identification of the creatures that are described in Revelation 13. In the previous chapter John described a great red dragon who sought to kill the offspring of the woman Israel. The dragon represented Satan.

In Revelation 11 we read how God sent two witnesses to the earth to testify in His name. Now Satan sends his two beasts. The beasts of chapter 13 are Satan's servants. They serve him in his attempt to destroy the work of God. In this meditation we will look at the first of these beasts.

The first beast came out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns. Notice that the crowns were not on the dragon's head but on his horns. Notice also that on each head was inscribed a blasphemous name. In order to understand this we need to refer to Revelation 17:9-12.

This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while... The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.

From these verses we understand that each horn and each head represents either a king or a political power. The beast coming up out of the sea had seven heads and ten horns. He represented a series of kings and political powers. Some of these powers had already come and gone; others were yet to come. These powers were cruel and mighty. John described the beast as resembling a leopard with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. These were the fiercest, cruellest and swiftest of all wild animals.

Notice that the source of the beast's power and cruelty was from the dragon. These political rulers were being controlled by Satan. This reminds us of how powerful an enemy we have in Satan. He is able to influence men and women of power so that they become his allies. We see this taking place in the days of Moses in Egypt when Satan put it in the heart of the Pharaoh to kill the male children of Israel. Satan influenced Herod to kill all the male children in the time of Christ. Throughout history men and women of God have lost their lives because Satan influenced political powers. The beast from the sea represents those powers.

Notice that one of the heads of the beast had a mortal wound that had been healed (verse 3). Commentators are

divided in the interpretation of this verse. It is not our purpose here to speculate concerning the exact identification of this head. What is clear, however, is that the head represented a king or a political power that had nearly fallen but regained its former glory.

Verse 3 tells us that the whole world followed the beast. We see again the powerful influence of Satan. Through these political powers, he succeeds in deceiving the world. Men and women were completely deceived by the enemy. They worshipped the dragon for giving such power to the beast. They worshipped the beast because they found nothing on earth like him. They felt secure in their belief that nothing could make war against such a great power and succeed.

The beast was given a mouth to speak great blasphemies against God. There is no doubt that this mouth was given to him by Satan the dragon. In some countries today we are seeing a great turning away from God. In Canada where I live, anything that relates to God is being removed from our schools, work places and government. We can see the enemy already at work.

The beast was given power to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He exercised his authority for the same period of time as God's two witnesses in Revelation 11. It is also the same period of time that the woman was protected from the dragon in chapter 12. What is important for us to understand here is that the power of the beast is limited. God will not let his influence go unchecked forever. He only has a short time to do his work.

During these three and a half years (forty two months), the beast blasphemed God. He slandered His name, His dwelling place and those who lived with Him in heaven. It



is not hard to feel the bitterness of the beast against the work of God. His hatred of God is intense.

Notice also that he was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. He would make war against God's people in every tribe, language and nation. Many would be deceived by him and his great power.

There would be those who would resist him. God had a people who would not bow the knee to him. Those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life would successfully resist him to the end. In those days the believer will be called on to suffer for their faith. The Lord did not stop the beast from killing His children. Some were destined to go into captivity. Some were destined to be killed by the sword. God calls on them to be true to the end. He calls on them to resist even to the point of death.

Those who remain on the earth at this time will suffer great persecution. We do not know when this great persecution will come. Scripture warns us, however, that it will come. The gospel writer challenges us to consider the cost before making a decision for the Lord (see Luke 14:28). Will you follow Him, knowing that you may be called on to die for His sake? May the Lord help us to understand the seriousness of our calling as servants. May we not be like those who "shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved" (Hebrews 10:39).

## For Consideration:

- What does the beast that comes out of the sea represent?
- Where does the beast that comes out of the sea get its power?
- Is there evidence of political powers in our day being controlled by Satan and lashing out at the kingdom of God?
- What kind of power and influence do these political powers have in the world? What effect does this have on the thinking of the people of the world?
- What happens to the believers who refuse to submit to the evil power and influence of the beast that comes out of the sea?
- What comfort do you take from the fact that the power of the beast out of the sea is limited? What does this tell us about God?

## For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray for those in power over you. Ask God to protect them from the evil influences of Satan.
- Ask the Lord to give you courage to stand firm to the end and not give in to temptation when things become difficult.
- Thank the Lord that while things may get difficult for the believer, He will always be in control. Thank Him that Satan's power is limited.



## 20

# THE BEAST OUT OF THE EARTH

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Read Revelation 13:11-18

The second of the two beasts came from the earth. The first beast was a seven headed monster. This second beast, however, resembled a lamb. While he resembled a lamb with his two horns, he spoke with the mouth of a dragon. We have seen already that the dragon was Satan. Satan also put his words in the mouth of this second beast. Listen to what Jesus tells us in Matthew 7.15:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Paul tells us in his second epistle to the Corinthians that Satan "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). The attempt of the enemy is obvious in this passage. He desires to deceive. The second beast looks like an innocent lamb but in reality he is a servant of the devil.

Much power and authority was given to this beast from the earth. He had the same authority as the first beast. The second beast was subject to the first beast and served him. We have already seen that the first beast received his power and authority from Satan. Both beasts are Satan's instruments.

The second beast is fully devoted to the first. He serves him and calls all the earth to worship him. He appears to act as priest. He is given power to perform great signs. He could call down fire from heaven. Many are deceived by his power.

How careful we need to be as believers. Like many others, we may be tempted to look at these signs and fall prey to the deception of this antichrist. Our enemy is powerful. His purpose is to deceive. In the days of Moses, the magicians of Pharaoh's court repeated the signs that God gave to His servant Moses. When Moses cast his rod on the ground and it became a serpent, the magicians did the same (Exodus 7:11-12). When Moses turned water into blood so did Pharaoh's magicians (Exodus 7:20-23). Satan will use his power to deceive even the people of God.

With this great display of power and authority, the second beast calls on the inhabitants of the earth to worship an image of the first beast. In his attempt to deceive, the first beast even caused the image to speak. Those who refused to worship the image were to be put to death. Many will fall down and worship the image for fear of their lives. Who will stand in those days for the cause of Christ? Who will be like Daniel's friends and refuse to worship this image (Daniel 3)?

The day is coming when Christians will have to suffer and die for their faith. Satan will lash out against the cause of

Christ. Believers in those days will face tremendous obstacles. This passage tells us that the first beast forced his followers to receive a mark, either on their forehead or on their right hand where it would be visible for all to see. This mark was a sign of ownership. Those who wore the mark belonged to the beast and claimed allegiance to him.

Only those who wore the mark of the beast could buy or sell. With no possibility of buying or selling, those who refused the mark of the beast would die. In those days the question for the believer will be: "Do I turn my back on my Lord and feed my family or will I remain true and die?" These will be difficult days. These will be days of separating the true believer from those who profess Christ in word only.

Verse 18 challenges us to calculate the number of the beast. His number is 666. Commentators have debated the meaning of this number throughout the ages. Different historical characters have been suggested, but the Bible simply does not tell us who or what this beast will be. Verse 18 does tell us that the number 666 is the number of man. It was on the sixth day that the Lord God created man. The number six represents man. The number seven represents perfection and by extension it represents God Himself. While man is the greatest of all the creation of God he is less than God. Why is the number six repeated three times? Is it because it represents the blasphemy of the beast against the triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)?

The most important principle of interpreting the Bible is to interpret Scripture by using Scripture. Often the Bible explains itself. There are instances such as this, however, where the Bible sheds no further light on the subject. Where the Bible is silent we too must be silent. We can

speculate as to possible meaning but our speculation will remain mere speculation.

What is clear in this passage is that the days are coming when Satan will apply pressure on the church of God. There are difficult days coming for the believer. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: Is my commitment to the Lord Jesus such that I could stand against the enemy on that day? Would I be among those who refused to wear the mark of the beast, choosing rather to die for the sake of my Lord? May God give us the grace to stand in those days.

For Consideration:

- What animal does the beast from the earth resemble? What does this show us about Satan's deception?
- What is the source of the words and power of the beast from the earth?
- What is the relationship between the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth?
- What will happen to those who refuse to worship the image of the beast or receive his mark?
- What does the number 666 represent?
- Do you believe that you would have the courage and strength necessary to remain faithful to the Lord in those days?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you great wisdom and discernment to know Him and His purpose. Ask him to give you grace to be faithful to the end.
- Take a moment to pray for those who are part of churches that are not preaching the truth of God. Ask God to open their eyes to see the truth before it is too late.
- Pray for your spiritual leaders that they would not be deceived by Satan and lead many astray.





## 21

### THE 144,000 VOICE CHOIR

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Read Revelation 14:1-5

There has been tremendous persecution on the earth. The two beasts have been ravaging the world. Lives have been lost. Those who have refused the mark of the beast have suffered tremendously. The two beasts exercise incredible power over the earth. Through their signs and wonders they succeed in deceiving many.

In his vision, the apostle John saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. This Lamb is not to be confused with the beast that resembled a lamb. This is the Lamb we met in Revelation 5 who alone was worthy to open the seals of the scroll. This is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lamb stood on Mount Zion. The context seems to imply that Mount Zion is heaven itself. The 144,000 with whom the Lamb stood have been redeemed from the earth (verse 3) and now stand in the presence of the Lamb before the throne of heaven. The time of their trials has come to an end. They are now with the Lord God.

Notice what this passage tells us about the 144,000. They have the name of the Father written on their foreheads. The inhabitants of the earth had the name of the beast written on their foreheads. The 144,000 refused to bear the name of the beast, choosing rather the name of their heavenly Father.

From verse 4 we see that the 144,000 had not defiled themselves with women but kept themselves pure. Most commentators see here a reference to the fact that these individuals remained morally pure and faithful to their God.

The 144,000 followed the Lamb wherever He went. They obeyed Him and followed His leading. Notice also that they were redeemed from among the inhabitants of the earth. The Lamb's blood was shed for them. He purchased them as His own. They were chosen, called and saved through the work of the Lamb on their behalf. Though they appear to be Jewish in nationality they have certainly accepted the work of the Lord Jesus as their sacrificial Lamb.

Notice that they were presented as first fruits to the Father. They were kept by Christ through their trials and presented to the Father as a holy people. The first fruit was an offering given to the Lord as a token of thanksgiving. Just as the first fruits offered to the Lord from the gardens of Israel had to be pure and without defect, these individuals were presented to the Father as a blameless offering. No lie was found in their mouth. God's work of perseverance was evident in the lives of these individuals. While they had been severely tried, the Lord had not abandoned them. None had been lost. All were presented to the Father.

As John examined the scene before him, he heard a sound as loud as rushing water with peals of thunder. As he listened more closely he heard the sound of harpists and a

great choir. They were singing before the throne of heaven. They sang a song that no one else could sing but the 144,000. Why could the 144,000 alone sing this song? They appear to have been specially chosen by God for a purpose during this tribulation that took place on the earth. Was their song a song of praise for the victory the Lamb had given to them? Was their song a personal testimony of thanksgiving? As the apostle John listened to them, he realized that this was a very personal song of praise they sung. They had been through what no one else had been through. They could now praise the Lamb in a way that no one else could praise Him.

The 144,000 stood with the Lamb, having overcome. The grace of the Lamb had carried them through. These verses remind us that we too can stand with the Lamb on the Mount of Victory. There is no struggle that God cannot overcome. What an experience it must have been to hear this song of victory. We can only imagine how hearts exploded in worship and adoration to the Lamb on the throne who had overcome and given them victory.

In our moments of trial let us listen again to this heavenly choir. All 144,000 voices testify in praise and worship to the grace and wisdom of God who will never abandon His people. The day is coming when we too, if we persevere, will join the heavenly choir in a song of praise and thanksgiving before the throne. Until that time, may God give us grace to persevere to the end.

## For Consideration:

- What has been happening on the earth as this chapter opens?
- Where are the 144,000 in this chapter? What are they doing?
- What encouragement do you take from the fact that all 144,000 have persevered and conquered?
- What struggles are you presently facing? Is God able to carry you through as He carried the 144,000?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while things will become more difficult for believers as His return draws near, He is still in control of history.
- Thank the Lord for how He has given you grace to persevere through your trials to this point. Thank him that He forgives us when we fall short.
- Ask God to give you grace to face your particular trial right now. Ask Him to give you strength to be faithful to Him.
- Do you know a fellow believer who is struggling through some difficult issues now? Ask God to give them strength to overcome.
- Thank the Lord for the bright hope we have of an eternity in His presence. Ask Him to take your eyes off your present earthy trials and set them on your hope of eternity.

## 22

# THE HARVEST OF THE EARTH

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Read Revelation 14:6-20

We saw in the last section that the 144,000 had been taken up to heaven. There they were to be spared from the evil that was about to fall on the earth. In this next section John met some angels who announced yet another great judgment of God on the earth.

The first angel flew in mid-air going from place to place with the message of the gospel. This gospel was to be proclaimed to every tribe, tongue and nation. He called the inhabitants of the earth to give glory to God. He invited them to worship the God who made the heavens and the earth. These people had been worshipping the beast. God had every right to destroy them without giving them another chance. They had, no doubt, been responsible for the death of many saints. The 144,000 had been left on the earth as God's witnesses but these individuals had not listened to them. The fact that God gives them yet another

opportunity to repent is a sign of His abundant grace. This, however, would be their final call.

Another angel followed the first. This angel announced the fall of Babylon. The nations had drunk the wine of her adulteries. They had fallen into her sin and turned their back on God. Babylon had taken God's people from their land, stripped them of all that God had given and carried them into captivity. Here Babylon seems to represent a system of worldliness and rebellion against God and the principles of His Word. God would have victory over this evil influence on the earth.

A third angel brought a warning to those who worshipped the beast and his image, and had received his mark. They would drink of the wrath of God. God's anger is pictured here as a cup of wine. The wine would be poured out full-strength on the worshippers of the beast. Their punishment would not be pleasant. He who worshipped the beast would be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of God and His angels. The smoke of their unending torment would rise forever. Day and night they would cry out in pain and agony. Hell is a horrible place. Ample warning is given to the earth. God is just in His punishment.

Notice that refusing the mark of the beast would not be easy. It would call for patient endurance on the part of the believer. Some believers would be called on to suffer and die for their faith in these days. What was their death, however, compared to the eternal wrath of God poured out on those who fell before the beast in worship? Those who died in the Lord were blessed. Their eternity would be glorious. In eternity they would rest from their struggles and trials.

The first three angels brought a warning to the earth. Now it was time for the judgment of God. John noticed before him a being like a human-like being seated on a cloud with a golden crown on his head. In his hand he held a sharp sickle. An angel came out of the temple and commanded him to reap the harvest of the earth. The one like the son of man swung his sickle and harvested the earth.

There is much debate over the identity of this individual who harvests the earth. Some see him as the Lord Jesus. The problem, however, is that John describes him as being like a son of man. Most pictures of the glorified Jesus are glorious and awesome. John does not seem to spend any time describing this individual except to say that he looked like a man. Second, this being is commanded by an angel to harvest the earth. It would seem inappropriate for an angel to give this command to our Lord Jesus.

We are not told what the angel harvested. This is the first harvest. It is possible that there is a separation of the believer and the unbeliever in this harvest. We will see that the second harvest is vastly different from this first. Before the outpouring of the wrath of God here, God seems to remove His people. They will join the 144,000 in heaven where they will be forever with the Lord. What follows this harvest is an intense judgment and destruction of what remains on the earth.

Another angel appeared from the temple. He also had a sharp sickle. As John watched, an angel, who was in charge of the fire on the altar, appeared. He commanded the angel with the sickle to gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine. Let's break this down. Notice first that the angel was in charge of the fire on the altar. What does the fire on the altar represent? In the Old Testament con-



text the altar was used for burning sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. The priest would burn these offerings. It is a symbol of the holiness and justice of God and the need for cleansing from sin. God was about to cleanse the earth of its sin.

This angel swung his sickle and harvested the grapes of the earth. These grapes may represent those who remained on the earth. These grapes are gathered and thrown into the winepress of God's wrath. Those who have been harvested are under the judgement of God. In the winepress their blood was trampled out of them until it rose to a height of a horse's bridle and covered a distance of 180 miles or 300 kilometres. In other words, there was a lot of blood as the wrath of God was unleashed on these unbelievers.

What a warning this is for us today. There is a coming judgment. This judgment will be severe. God will pour out His wrath. As a holy God, He must judge evil. God is also compassionate. He offers us every opportunity to turn to Him. He has warned humanity about this coming judgment ever since the Garden of Eden. The day is coming, however, when God will stop warning and pour out His wrath.

For Consideration:

- What opportunities does the Lord give the inhabitants of the earth to repent in this section of Scripture?
- What does Babylon represent? What will happen to her?
- What do we learn about the eternal judgment of the unbeliever?

- Compare the persecution of believers on this earth for their faith with the eternal judgment of the unbeliever. What challenge does this bring?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His great mercy in warning and pleading with sinners to repent.
- Thank the Lord that the day is coming when all evil will be destroyed and righteousness will triumph.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that while believers may have to suffer here in this life they have a bright hope for eternity in His presence
- Take a moment to pray for friends and neighbours who do not know the Lord Jesus and who have never accepted His forgiveness. Ask God to give you an opportunity to share with them the hope you have in Christ.



## 23

# THE SEVEN BOWLS POURED OUT

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Read Revelation 15-16

Chapters 15 and 16 of the book of Revelation must be taken together. In these chapters we meet the seven angels who held in their hands the seven last plagues that will devastate the earth. When these plagues are poured out, the wrath of God will be complete.

As John watched these angels, he noticed in heaven a great sea or basin of glass mixed with fire. We have already seen this sea or basin in Revelation 4:6. There is a difference, however, between the sea of Revelation 4 and the sea in chapter 15. The sea of Revelation 4 was as clear as crystal. The sea of chapter 15 is mixed with fire.

We read in Revelation 4 that the sea or basin was before the throne of God in heaven. We can safely assume that the sea in chapter 15 is also before the throne. It is quite

possible that this sea is a reference to the basin in the tabernacle in which the priest needed to wash themselves before approaching the altar for worship.

Why is the sea mixed with fire? Is it possible that it was the fire of persecution and tribulation that purified the saints that stood around it? Both fire and water purify and cleanse. All around the sea stood those who had not worshipped the beast. Many of them had died because of their faith. They had to pass through the fire and the water to reach the celestial shore.

Those who had overcome the beast were given harps. They had been purified in the sea and now stood before their God. They sang the song of Moses. What is the song of Moses? Moses sang a song of deliverance after being used of God to free his people from the bondage of Egypt. Those standing before the throne had a similar song to sing. They had been delivered from the beast. They worshipped God whose deeds were marvelous. He had proven Himself to be the Lord God Almighty, to whom nothing was impossible. His ways were just and true.

There are times when we wonder about the justice of God in our trials. These individuals, however, could stand on the shore of the great sea of heaven and proclaim that though they had died a horrible death at the hands of the beast, their God had not abandoned them. They served a God who was true to His word. They served a God who was just in all He did.

The God these people worshipped was the King of Ages. From eternity to eternity He was the sovereign Lord. Nothing was out of His hands. All creatures needed to fear and reverence Him. He alone was holy. There was no sin in Him. He did all things perfectly. All the nations would fall

down before Him because He was about to judge the earth. Coming from those who had suffered so greatly at the hands of the beast, this statement is a tremendous testimony to the grace of God.

As John listened to this song of praise his heart must have overflowed. As he watched, the Tabernacle of Testimony appeared. In Old Testament times the Lord's presence was in the tabernacle. God was revealing Himself. From out of that tabernacle came seven angels with seven plagues. These angels were dressed in linen robes and wore golden sashes about their chests. They were dressed in priestly garments. One of the living creatures before the throne of God gave a golden bowl to each angel. These bowls were filled with the wrath of God.

When the bowls were distributed, the temple was filled with smoke. This smoke came from the glory of God who was making His presence known. No one could enter the temple until the bowls had been poured out on the earth. Let us now examine what these bowls contained.

The first angel poured his bowl on the land. His bowl contained painful sores that broke out on those who worshipped the beast and had received his mark. There is no reference to any believer here at this time.

The second angel poured out his bowl on the waters of the sea. The sea turned to blood. We see a similar incident in Revelation 8:8. In Revelation 8:8, however, only one third of the waters of the sea were affected. In this passage all the creatures of the sea died. This judgment was final.

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water. As he poured out his bowl, he reminded the earth of the justice of God in sending this judgment. He

told the earth that they had shed the blood of the saints and prophets of God. The Lord was avenging the death of His servants.

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun. The sun's heat grew in intensity, scorching the thirsty inhabitants of the earth. The heat became unbearable. There was no water to drink. Their death was painful and agonizing. They did not repent of their evil deeds, however. They still chose to harden their hearts and curse the God of heaven.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. His kingdom was plunged into darkness. It is possible that the light of the sun was snuffed out. This darkness may also refer to a state of confusion and chaos. The result of this darkness was that humanity writhed in agony. They realized that there was one more powerful than the beast. They refused, however, to repent of their rebellion, choosing rather to curse the God of heaven because of their pain.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the river Euphrates. The water of the river was dried up and opened the way for the kings of the East to cross the river. The Euphrates River formed a natural barrier for the people of God in Israel against their enemy. The drying up of this river allowed the enemy to attack. This river had seen the birth of creation. It is one of the rivers that flowed through the Garden of Eden. This same river will see the final judgment of creation. The way is prepared now for a great battle to take place.

When the Euphrates River dried up, John saw three evil spirits resembling frogs. They came out of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. An evil spirit came out of each of these beings. Realizing that their end was approaching,

they moved through the land to gather the kings of the earth together for a final assault against God. They know they cannot defeat God but their hearts are hardened. John noticed that they went with their signs and wonders to deceive the nations and draw them into this great battle. If they were going to be defeated they would seek to do as much damage as possible before they fall. This final battle would take place in a region called Armageddon.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. The result was flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. A great earthquake, the likes of which the world had never seen, shook the earth. This earthquake was so great that the cities of the earth crumbled. The great city (referring to symbolic Babylon) was split into three parts. Babylon was forced to drink the cup of God's wrath. So great was the devastation that the mountains could no longer be found. Had they crumbled under the intense wrath of God? The islands fled away. They too could not be found. Did they sink into the depths of the sea? From the sky there fell great hailstones of one hundred pounds each. These hailstones were the judgment of God on the earth. They destroyed the earth.

Though they saw the wrath of God, the inhabitants of the earth continued to curse His name. How hard the human heart can be. The wrath of God is justified against these individuals. They go to their grave cursing His name. Were it not for the grace of God working in us, taking away our heart of stone, we would be among this crowd. How we need to worship Him today. How we need to praise Him that He has made us new creatures. His grace alone has broken our rebellion and set us free.



## For Consideration:

- What is the difference between the sea of glass in Revelation 4 and the sea in Revelation 15?
- How have the saints of Revelation 15 been purified and cleansed?
- How does suffering purify us? How have the trials you faced in life changed your life and drawn you closer to the Lord?
- Despite their persecution, suffering and death the saints around the sea of glass in heaven still worship the Lord God. What do you have to worship God for in your suffering?
- What is the attitude of the people on the earth toward that judgment of God? How do they respond to God? What does this tell us about the human heart?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that the things you face in life can be used to draw you closer to Him.
- Take a moment to consider why you need to praise the Lord in your circumstance. Take a moment to praise and thank Him now.
- Thank the Lord that He saw fit to break your hard heart and soften it so that it could respond to Him.
- Ask God to soften the hearts of your friends and loved ones who have not yet opened themselves to His grace and salvation.

## BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

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Read Revelation 17:1-18

This world has many attractions. Countless men and women have made shipwreck of their faith because they had been attracted to the beauty of riches and pleasure.

After the pouring out of the seventh bowl, an angel approached John and called him to see the punishment of the great prostitute. Who is this great prostitute? The angel told John that the kings of the world and all the inhabitants of the earth had committed fornication with her. It is generally agreed among commentators that the prostitute symbolized all that is contrary to God. Some commentators are more specific and believe that she represents the pursuit of the riches and pleasures of this world. If this is the case, it is not difficult to see how she has intoxicated the world. Satan tells us that our goal in life is to glorify self and enjoy the pleasures of the world for as long as we can. The great prostitute represents this philosophy.

Notice that the prostitute is seated on many waters. Verse 15 tells us that the waters represent peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The fact that she is seated on them shows us that she rules over them. They are her prisoners.

Notice that the woman herself is in the desert. This would seem to be the last place you would expect to see her. Has she been exiled there by the Lord? Maybe her pursuit of pleasure had left her barren and empty like the desert? She is dressed in purple and scarlet. Scarlet and purple were the colors of royalty. The soldiers dressed Christ in a scarlet robe and put a crown of thorns on his head and cried out: "Hail, King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:28-29). She glittered with gold, precious stones and pearls. She had been enjoying the riches of the world but for all this she was in the desert.

The great prostitute had a golden cup in her hand. The cup was filled with abominations. It contained the filth of her adulteries. On the outside, the cup was attractive but inside it was filled with evil. This is a powerful description of sin.

John noticed that the prostitute had a title written on her forehead: "Mystery Babylon the Great, The Mother of Prostitutes and Abominations of the Earth." She is Mystery Babylon. She is not literal Babylon but a symbolic Babylon. Babylon was the enemy of the people of God. This woman represented all that opposed God. She is the mother of prostitutes. Spiritual prostitution is the turning away from God to find meaning and fulfillment in other things, people or gods. This woman represented this turning away from God and the pursuit of the pleasures of this world. She represented all the sin and abomination that took place on the earth in the pursuit of meaning apart from God.

John noticed that the woman was drunk. She was not drunk with alcohol however. She was drunk with the blood of the saints. While she appears, at first glance to be a very beautiful woman, she is a very dangerous woman. She has destroyed many believers. Her lust to destroy believers has been controlling her like alcohol controls an alcoholic.

The woman is seated on a beast. The beast is covered with blasphemous names. This beast had seven heads and ten horns. Is it possible that this beast is the same beast as the one described in chapter 13? We are told in Revelation 17:9-11 that the seven heads represent seven hills. The city of Rome is well known for its seven hills. John would have immediately understood this reference to seven hills to refer to Rome. Rome was the political power of the day. Rome may represent the political opposition to the church.

From verses 12 to 14 we learn that the ten horns represent ten kings who had not yet received a kingdom. The time was coming, however, when they would receive their authority. This authority would be short lived. They would receive their command for the express purpose of making war against the Lamb. The identity of these ten kings is not given. The outcome of the battle, however, had already been determined. Verse 13 makes it clear that the Lamb and His faithful followers would overcome them.

From verse 8 we learn that the beast upon which the woman rode "once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction." The energy behind the beast is Satanic. Revelation 13:4 tells us that it was the dragon (Satan) who gave the beast with seven heads and ten horns his authority. The influence of Satan has been

felt in this world from the beginning of time. In this sense Satan "once was."

In Revelation 16:10-11 we discover that the kingdom of the beast will be plunged into darkness before the final battle of Armageddon. Chapter 20 of Revelation describes for us a period of one thousand years during which Satan will be bound so as to no longer deceive the nations. This may be the interpretation for the phrase "now is not." It refers to this period of time when Satan's efforts will be held back.

At the end of this period of one thousand years, Satan will again be released to continue his work. If we are to understand Revelation 17:8 we need to understand it in the context of the remainder of the book of Revelation. Satan's power is to be curtailed before he is set free for his final rampage. His destruction is sure. Verse 8 tells us that the beast will come up out of the Abyss and go on to final destruction. This coincides perfectly with Revelation 20:7-10 where Satan is released from his prison to deceive the nations for a time and then to finally be cast into the lake of fire.

Notice in verse 16 that the beast would turn against the woman, bringing her to ruin. Her flesh would be burnt with fire. Though she had boasted of many things, she left all who followed her destitute. Now she herself is left abandoned. The earth has no more pleasures to offer.

How many people have been lured away from the Lord by the riches and the pleasure of this world? They do not realize that these pleasures of Babylon are controlled by Satan. How many souls have been lost because they listened to the temptation of the world of pleasure and riches? Mystery Babylon dressed in her glittering gold holds out a golden cup. The cup is attractive. It shines with brilliance.

Those who drink of this cup find themselves empty. Its poison drains them of their spiritual vitality.

This section reminds us that the pleasures and riches of this world are only temporary. Babylon, with all its worldly pleasures will fade away.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn here in this section about the attraction of riches and pleasures? Do you see people in your community who have been caught up in the pursuit of these things?
- What in particular do you wrestle with in this world that takes your attention away from God?
- What is the power behind the attraction of riches and pleasure according to this section?
- What do we learn here about the defeat of "Mystery Babylon" and all her glitter?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to keep you from being blinded by the attractions of this world.
- Is there anything that keeps you from God today? Ask God to reveal Himself and His beauty to you. Ask Him to give you strength to turn from anything that would distract you from him.
- Thank the Lord for the assurance that Satan will ultimately be defeated.
- Ask God to open the eyes to the beauty of Christ. Ask Him to break the hold of the enemy to seek after riches and pleasure more than God.



## 25

### BABYLON'S FALL

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Read Revelation 18

As chapter 18 begins John saw an angel coming down from heaven. This angel had been given much authority. The earth was illuminated by his glory. He spoke with a mighty voice. While it is not clearly stated we are left to wonder if this angel is the Lord Jesus.

The angel came down from heaven to announce the fall of Babylon. At one time Babylon was a centre of activity. Merchants from all over the world came to her shores to buy and sell. Now she was desolate. The only creatures living there now were demons, evil spirits and impure birds.

Babylon was judged because she had served the kings of the earth and all the nations from the cup of her adulteries. She had seduced the kings, nations and merchants of the earth. They fell prey to her temptations and evil practices. She was responsible for luring the world away from her creator by offering them her pleasures and riches.



John heard a second voice from heaven. This voice called out to the people of God to come out of the city of Babylon. There are two reasons why the people of God were to leave the symbolic city of Babylon, symbol of the pursuit of pleasure and riches. The first reason was that God did not want them to participate in her sins. The second reason was that God did not want them to suffer any of her plagues (verse 4).

The temptation is for Christians to get caught up in the lie of Babylon. Babylon stands for the pleasures and riches of this world. How many Christians have fallen into the trap of seeking these pleasures and possessions? We are challenged here not to be fooled by the glitter of gold and the seduction of pleasure. These things will only draw us away from our Lord.

Notice that God's people are separated from the unbelievers here. Before this great judgment of Babylon God's people are removed.

The sins of Babylon had piled up to the heavens. As the list of unpunished sins grew, people began to feel comfortable. They started to believe that they would not be punished for their sins at all. They felt God would overlook their sins. This was not so. God remembered their evil. They would be paid back in full for their evil. God told them that they would receive as much torture and grief as they had given themselves luxury and glory. This is not to say that riches are evil in themselves. The sin of these individuals was that they loved their riches and pleasures more than they loved God. Their pleasures and riches had in fact become their god.

Babylon and all she represented was proud. She claimed that she would never see sorrow (verse 7). God would

prove her wrong. She would be overtaken by plague, death, mourning, and famine. She would be consumed by the fire of His wrath.

We see in this chapter, the reaction of various groups to the destruction of Babylon. The kings of the earth, who shared in the adulteries of Babylon were terrified at what they saw (verses 9-10). They could not understand how such a great city could fall so quickly. The merchants mourned because their source of profit has been destroyed (verses 11-17). The sea captains threw dust in their faces and wept because they had lost their source of income (verses 17-20).

In his vision, John saw a mighty angel pick up a boulder and throw it into the sea. John heard the angel say that Babylon would be cast down into the sea with the same violence. When a boulder is cast into the sea it is never recovered again. It falls to the bottom of the sea to be forgotten. This is what would happen to Babylon.

The sound of musicians would no longer be heard in the symbolic city of Babylon. All music would fade. The sound of workmen would be halted. The millstone would stop for there would be nothing more to grind at the mill. No lights would burn in the lamps. The sound of rejoicing would no longer be heard in the land. The merchants of Babylon were the world's greatest and richest people but they would fall. The magic of Babylon's materialism had led the nations astray. She had been responsible for the death of many saints. Their blood had saturated her soil. Babylon, with her materialism and worldly pleasures would be judged by God and destroyed.

The possessions and the pleasures of this world will not last forever. They will leave us dry and unfulfilled in the

end. How many people have been led astray by the lure of Babylon only to find out that in the end they were spiritually barren. Have you based your life on something that is doomed to destruction? When the judgment comes and all the glitter is burned away and we are revealed for who we really are, only the true spiritual gold will remain.

#### For Consideration:

- What does Babylon represent? How much of her influence do you see around you today?
- How tempting is it for believers to get caught up in the attraction of pleasures and riches?
- The followers of Babylon thought that because God delayed in punishing them they would not have to answer Him. Have you met people who live their lives as though they did not have to answer to God?
- How easy is it for us to trust riches and possessions and not God?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to resist the attraction of riches and pleasures so that they do not distract you from your relationship with Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to provide for all our needs. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you trusted the things of this world more than Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is greater and more beautiful than anything this world can offer.

## **26**

# **THE FALL OF THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET**

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Read Revelation 19

Babylon has fallen. There remains four enemies yet to be defeated; the beast, the false prophet, the dragon and death. The scene before us is in heaven. John saw a great multitude praising the Lord. They praised Him because He had defeated Babylon with all her evil pleasures and riches. They praised Him because He judged her in truth and justice. They praised Him because He had avenged the blood of His servants.

Babylon, the great prostitute, symbol of the pleasures and riches of this world, had been judged. Her smoke rose up for ever and ever as a continual reminder of the victory of the Lamb. She would never rise again to deceive the world. Her destruction was final. Many had put their trust in Babylon with all her riches and pleasures. They fell prey to her glitter and entertainment. The smoke of Babylon now rose up forever as a testimony to her defeat.

As John listened to the multitude praising God, he noticed that the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures had joined them in worship. From the throne he heard a voice calling all God's servants, both small and great, to praise and adore the one and only true God. When it comes to our relationship with God, our social standing is of no significance. We stand on equal terms before our God. Both small and great bow down together before the God of heaven.

In response to the call from the throne, a great multitude began to praise the Lord God. Their voice was as loud as a great peal of thunder. "Hallelujah, the Lord God Almighty reigns," they cried. They sang of a great wedding that was about to take place. The bridegroom was Christ. The bride, who had adorned herself for the occasion, was His church. She was clothed with the finest of linen symbolizing her righteousness (verse 8). An angel told John to write: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (verse 9).

John was so struck by the thought of this great reunion of Christ with His church that he bowed down to worship the messenger who brought him the news. The angel warned John not to bow down to him for he was a simple servant like him. God alone was to be worshipped. "Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," the angel told him. We need to take a moment to examine the words of the angel to John at that time.

The central theme of this book of prophecy is the Lord Jesus. Everything in the prophecy that John received that day had as its goal to point him to Christ and His faithful testimony. The angel who brought John the message was only a servant who announced what the Lord Jesus would accomplish. John was not to fall down before him because

of the message he proclaimed. His adoration was to be reserved for the Lord Jesus and Him alone who made all these things possible. The testimony of Jesus was the whole Spirit of this prophecy and that of much of Scripture. All prophecy pointed to Him as the fulfillment of all things. As wonderful as this message was it was only a vehicle to point John to Christ who alone is worthy of his praise.

After this reminder of the centrality of Christ, John noticed that the heavens opened up. A white horse with a rider appeared. The rider on the white horse was called Faithful and True. He came out to make war and to judge the world. His eyes penetrated like blazing fire. He wore many crowns on his head, possibly a symbol of his many conquests. He also had a name which was known only to Himself. We are told that His name was "Word of God."

Why would the name be known only to him? Is it possible that He was the only one who could legitimately bare this name? A name in Biblical times represented the character of the person who took it. Who but the Lord Jesus could carry the name: "Word of God?" Who else could represent the Word of God perfectly? John was aware of this title. In his own account of the life of Christ, he had used this very name to refer to Christ (see John 1:1).

The rider wore a robe that was dipped in blood. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ had been shed. His victories had cost Him His life. That blood had redeemed humanity from the hands of the enemy.

Behind the rider on the white horse was a great army. Each soldier was dressed in linen. At first glance we wonder why a soldier would be dressed in linen. This is hardly the normal attire for a soldier. We need to recognize, how-

ever, that these linen garments represented the righteousness of the saints (see verse 8). These saints have come to make war with the beast and the false prophet. The battle that would be waged against the beast and the false prophet would be won by those who were in a right relationship with Christ. This battle was not about superior strength and weapons. The battle did not require swords, spears and physical weapons. Those who fought in this battle against the beast and the false prophet needed to be clothed in righteousness. The righteousness of Christ was the proper attire for those following the rider on the white horse. Only those who are clothed in the righteousness of Christ could wage this war.

The description of the rider of the white horse continues in verse 15. He had a sword coming out of his mouth by which He would strike down the nations. The sword likely represents the Word of God. By this word the Lord created the world. By this same word He would bring to an end the reign of the beast and his false prophet.

Notice that the Lord Jesus will rule the world with an iron sceptre. His rule would be unquestioned. He would judge the world. He would tread the winepress in His fury. The image here is of a person treading the grapes to squeeze out the juice. The grapes are the enemies of Christ. The juice is their blood.

The rider of the white horse wore a name on his thigh and his robe: "King of kings and Lord of lords." He was the sovereign ruler of the world. To Him every knee will bow.

In preparation for this great battle, the apostle John saw an angel standing in the sun, calling out to the birds of the air to gather for a great banquet. They would eat the flesh

of great kings and generals. They would gorge themselves with the blood of mighty men, free men, and slaves.

The beast, the false prophet and the kings of the earth gathered to make war against the Lamb and his army. The beast and the false prophet were captured and thrown into the lake of fire. The rest of the army were killed with the sword. The birds of the air ate their flesh. The Lamb was victorious over the beast, the false prophet and the kings of the earth.

The second and third great enemies have now been defeated. They had exercised much power and authority over the earth. All the nations of the earth had been deceived by these beasts. They had openly blasphemed the name of the Lord. They had been responsible for the death of many saints. The Lord will win the battle. The Lamb will be victorious over the beasts.

For Consideration:

- What are the five enemies to be defeated?
- John is tempted here to worship the messenger because of the beauty of the message. Have you ever found yourself following the messenger rather than the One he represents? How easy is it to be followers of people rather than followers of God?
- Who is the rider on the white horse in this chapter? What do we learn about Him?
- The soldiers in the army of the rider on the white horse were dressed in white linen. What does this linen represent and why was it the appropriate dress for a soldier?



- Notice that the central focus of this chapter is not the beast and the false prophet who were defeated but the Lord Jesus who defeated them. What does this tell us about how to fight the battle against Satan, the world and sin today?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the rider of the white horse. Thank the Lord Jesus that He is the rider of that horse and that He comes to give us complete victory.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be dressed in the linen of righteous. Ask Him to show you if there are any areas of your life that need to be covered in His righteousness.
- Ask the Lord to help you to keep your focus on Him in your struggle against evil.

## 27

# THE DEFEAT OF THE DRAGON AND DEATH

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Read Revelation 20

Babylon and the two beasts have been defeated. John now saw an angel coming down from heaven with a key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. We are not given the identity of this angel. He seized the dragon, which is Satan, and cast him into a bottomless pit. Satan was bound in the pit by means of this chain for a period of one thousand years.

Notice the reason for the binding of Satan. Verse 3 tells us that Satan was bound so that he could no longer deceive the nations. Through the beast and the false prophet there had been much deception on the earth. People were deceived by their power, signs and wonders. The beast and the false prophet have been defeated. Satan now has been bound so he can no longer deceive the nations. The question that immediately comes to the surface is whether the inhabitants of the earth will now turn to God. How easy

it would be to blame the beasts and the dragon for unbelief. We will now see if their removal will change the human heart.

What will take place during this period of one thousand years? Verse 4 tells us that the souls of those who had been beheaded for not worshipping the beast or receiving his mark came back to life and reigned with Christ. These believers had faced great suffering but had remained faithful to their Lord. They had not submitted to the beast or received his mark. They were raised to life to reign with Christ and judge the earth during these one thousand years.

Revelation 20:5 tells us that not everyone was raised to life at this time. The rest of the dead did not come back to life until after the reign of one thousand years. Who are the rest of the dead? Those who are raised from the dead in verse 4 are those who had been beheaded for not worshipping the beast and receiving his mark. This implies that the rest of the dead were either unbelievers or possibly those who were not alive at the time of the beasts.

Those raised from the dead at this point are part of what the Bible calls the first resurrection (verse 5). If this is the first resurrection, the assumption is that there is a second resurrection. We read about this in verses 11-15.

Verse 6 tells us that those who are part of this first resurrection will not have to face the second death. What is the first and second death? The first death is physical death. Each of us must face this death. The second death, however, is not physical but spiritual. This death is described for us in Revelation 20:14. Verse 14 tells us that the second death is in the lake of fire. The lake of fire is a place of eternal punishment. It is a reference to hell. It is a place of

eternal separation from God where there is no hope of ever knowing God again. Those who are part of the first resurrection were believers. They would escape the flames of hell and the second death.

As to the details of this reign of Christ, the Bible remains silent. Suffice it to say that there is freedom for the church to live and witness for the Lord in peace and security away from the distractions of Babylon, symbol of the pursuit of riches and pleasures. Satan and his two beasts have also been silenced and can no longer distract the inhabitants of the earth.

Verse 7 tells us that at the end of this period, Satan will be released. He will gather unbelievers for a final battle against the people of God.

It is important to note that during this thousand year reign of Christ, there are still many unbelievers on the earth. At the end of the one thousand years, Satan again goes out to deceive the nations. In spite of the one thousand year reign of Christ, Satan succeeds in finding many who still hate the cause of Christ. In verse 8 he gathered Gog and Magog to war against Christ and the church. Notice that the number of unbelievers Satan was successful in gathering together were as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

What is most striking in this period of history is that while the beast, the false prophet and Satan are out of the picture, human nature is still not changed. Satan, after one thousand years of being chained, still found people as numerous as the sand of the seashore who hated the cause of Christ. These individuals cannot blame Satan for their hard heart. They could not blame the beast or the false prophet. Even Babylon, the symbol of riches and pleasure

had been defeated. They live in a world where Christ reigns with His risen saints and still they reject Him and his offer of salvation. The only thing to blame here is their sinful heart. This period of time shows us clearly we cannot blame anyone else for our rejection of Christ. The sinful human heart alone is sufficient to keep us from Christ.

As we have said the passage tells is that Satan is successful at the end of this one thousand years to gather a multitude of people alone with God and Magog to wage war against the people of God. Who are Gog and Magog? From Ezekiel 38 and 39 we understand that Gog was a prince of the land of Magog. In Ezekiel 38:4 Gog attacked the children of God with an alliance of nations backing him up. This is the same picture in this chapter. Gog seems to represent those who are opposed to God and His people. This great army surrounded the city of God, where God's people reigned with Him. They came to destroy and overcome the people of God. The battle was short-lived. God rained fire from heaven and destroyed them. This is also what happened in Ezekiel 38:22.

The devil was thrown into the lake of fire. He joined the beast and the false prophet. There in that lake of fire this trio would be tormented day and night. They would never be released from their suffering and torment. This brings an end to four of the enemies of God (Babylon, the Beast, the prophet, and Satan the dragon).

After these events John saw a great white throne appear in heaven. Seated on the throne was one who made the earth and sky flee from His presence. This can be none other than God. As John watched, the dead appeared before the throne. The sea and the graves opened up and rendered the souls of those who had perished in them. They stood before the judgment seat of God. The books of

heaven were opened up. Those whose names were not found in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire with the devil, the beast and the false prophet.

Each person was judged according to his or her deeds. When they had all been judged, death and the grave were cast into the lake along with them. There now remains no enemy to challenge the sovereign authority of God. He has proven Himself to be victorious over all His enemies.

#### For Consideration:

- What is the first resurrection? Who will be part of that first resurrection?
- What is the first and second death?
- Satan will be bound for a period of one thousand years. Does this change the hearts of those who are on earth? What does this tell us about the real cause of rebellion and sin?
- What is the Great White Throne Judgment? Do you have assurance that you will be able to stand in that day before God? What gives you that assurance?

#### For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He will be victorious over all His enemies.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He broke your hard heart and made it soft toward Him.
- If you know the Lord Jesus today thank Him that He has given you the assurance that you can stand

before the Great White Throne with assurance that all your sins are forgiven.

## THE HEAVENLY CITY

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Read Revelation 21

After the dead were judged, John saw a new heaven and a new earth. The old heaven, (sky) earth and sea had been destroyed. Revelation does not describe this event. In his vision John saw a great city coming down from heaven. The city was called the New Jerusalem, the Holy City. The city was adorned like a bride for her husband.

The new city is located on a new earth under a new sky. In that new city God will be honoured. Sin will be unknown. In the New Jerusalem there will be no more tears. There will be no reason for tears. Death, sickness, mourning, and pain will be banished. These things belong to the present age. They have no place in the new city.

John heard a voice inviting all who were thirsty to come and drink of the water of life freely. Notice that while the invitation was extended to all, it was only those who overcame who would inherit eternal life in the presence of God (verse 7). The cowardly would not inherit the kingdom of



God. Who are the cowardly? The writer to the Hebrews describes them in Hebrews 10:38-39:

But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus will be put to the test throughout our lives. The proof that we belong to the Lord Jesus is found in our perseverance in the faith to the end. It is all too easy to give people false assurance of their salvation. The proof of whether we are truly saved comes through the trial of our faith.

This does not mean that we are saved on the basis of our good works and perseverance. Salvation is a free gift received from the Lord Jesus and has nothing to do with our works. The reality of the matter, however, is that those who are truly saved have a change of heart and mind that makes them want to serve and honour the Lord in all they do. Those who truly belong to Him will willingly persevere through the trials and suffering that comes their way because they are devoted to their Lord. The test of their sincerity is in their perseverance.

No sinner will enter the holy city. The fearful, unbelieving, vile, murderer, immoral, sorcerer, idolater, or liar will all be denied entrance. Their place will be in the lake of fire. They will be separated eternally from God and His people.

John is carried off in a vision and permitted a glance into the Holy City. He tells us here what he saw. The city shone with the glory of the Lord. He compared this glory to the brilliance of pure jasper. All around the city was a high wall with twelve gates. At each gate an angel stood guard. On

each gate was the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel described a city that had twelve gates with the name of a tribe of Israel on each gate (see Ezekiel 48:30-34). There were also twelve foundation stones under the city walls. Each of these foundation stones had the name of an apostle.

Like the angel of Ezekiel's day, the angel guiding John through the holy city had a measuring rod in his hand (see Ezekiel 40:3). The walls of the city were measured. The city was square. Each wall measured 1,400 miles or 2,200 kilometres in length. The thickness (some commentators see here height rather than thickness) was 200 feet or 65 meters. These walls were made of jasper.

The city was pure gold. Each of the foundation stones, on which the name of an apostle was written, was shaped from a precious stone. The gate of the city was a single pearl. The streets were paved with pure gold.

There was no temple in the city for the Lord lived among them (verse 22). Every day was a day of worship and praise to God. Every day God's people walked in His presence. His glory shone in the city. There was no need for the sun, for the glory of the Lord lit the city (verse 23). People from many nations walked in the light of His glory (verse 24). The gates of the city would never be closed for there would be no enemy to attack (verse 25). Nothing impure would ever enter the city. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life could enter (verse 27).

Is your name written in the book of life? Have you heard the invitation to come and drink of the water of life freely? Is the Lord preparing a home for you in that city? Will that pearly gate open up for you? May we all be assured that

our name is recorded in this book of life. May God give each reader the assurance that he or she is a child of God and citizen of this New Jerusalem.

For Consideration:

- What will happen to the present earth and heavens?
- Describe the Holy City? What do you expect to see in this city?
- Who will enter the New Jerusalem? How can you know if you are going to have a home in this city?
- How is perseverance a test of the sincerity of our faith? Have you been persevering?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the hope of a new city?
- Ask the Lord to help you to persevere through the trials and suffering you face today? Thank Him that all that you suffer is nothing compared to the hope you have in Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He has made it possible for you to enter this new city through His work on the cross for you.

## 29

# THE CONCLUSION OF THE VISION

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Read Revelation 22

As the apostle John concluded his tour of the heavenly city, the angel showed him a river flowing from the throne of God. The water in this river was life-giving water. Some commentators see here a symbolic reference to salvation. Ezekiel had a very similar vision in Ezekiel 47:1.

This river flowed down the street of the Holy City. The Tree of Life grew on each side of the river. We first read about this tree in Genesis. God placed the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. From Genesis 3:22 we understand that it gave eternal life:

And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.

In Genesis, humans were banned from eating from this tree, but now those who live in the heavenly city are given full access to its fruit.

Every month the Tree of Life would produce its fruit. Its leaves were for the healing of the nations. The question could be asked, why would such leaves be necessary if there was no sickness and disease? Could it be that these leaves were the source of their healing? People from every nation had been healed by these leaves. No sickness can harm them now.

In that land, we will no longer be under the curse of sin. Sin, sickness, suffering, and Satan have all been defeated. There will be nothing in the city to distract us in our relationship with God. The Lamb, Jesus Christ will be in the city. We will serve Him and enjoy Him forever.

In the holy city there will be no night. We will live in the glorious light of the presence of God. His glory will light the city. There we will reign with Jesus forever. All these blessings belong to those who keep the words of the prophecy of Revelation.

The apostle John was overwhelmed by what he saw that day. He fell at the feet of the messenger who showed him these things. The angel warned him to worship God alone. We are left wondering why such a great man as John would bow the knee to someone other than God. The temptation is real for us even in our day. How often do we worship the messenger rather than the one who sends the messenger? Have you ever been tempted to bow down before a gifted preacher of the word? Have you ever met men or women of God who inspired reverence and respect? How easy it is to forget that they are mere men and women like us.

The angel told John that he is not to seal up the word of his prophecy for the time was near. These words would be a guide for those who went through the trials recorded therein. The time was getting short. Every person was to make up his or her mind concerning the words of this prophecy. Some would continue in their evil practices and ignore the words. God would not stop them. Others would take the words seriously. God would be pleased with them.

John is reminded that the Lord Jesus was coming soon. He had a reward with Him. He would reward each one according to his or her actions. Those who washed their robes would be blessed. The washing of the robes was symbolic of forgiveness and righteous living. These individuals would be given the right to the tree of life. They would eat of that tree and live forever. As for the others, they would be cast outside. They would never enter the Holy City.

Verse 16 reminds us that the Lord Jesus is the true author of the Revelation. He is the Root of David, the promised Messiah. He is also the Morning Star, the promise of a new day or a new life. It was Jesus who sent His messenger John to prepare us for the times to come. Because this is God's word to us, we do not have a right to add or take away any part of it.

He who adds to this book will find that God will add to him or her the plagues described in the book. He who takes away from the book will lose his or her right to the Tree of Life. It is a serious offense to treat this prophecy lightly. The Lord placed His mark of protection on it.

As I have been writing this commentary I have been conscious of how easy it is to add to the prophecy. We can add to this prophecy by giving it meaning it never intended

to have. There have been many who have interpreted this book very specifically by placing names of people, countries and dates on each prophecy. Many have also been proven wrong. How careful we need to be not to add interpretations to this prophecy that we cannot prove. This has been my primary struggle in writing this commentary. Time alone will show the identity of the characters described here.

Notice in verse 17 that the invitation is still open to come to Christ. If you can hear the voice of the Lord you are invited to come to Him. If you are thirsty, you are invited to drink of the water of life. The Lord tells us that He is coming soon. Will you be ready for His return? You will be ready only if you accept His invitation.

#### For Consideration:

- What does the water coming from the throne of God represent?
- What does the Tree of Life represent? What power does it have?
- Take a moment to consider what it will be like to be in the presence of the Lord free from any distraction.
- Are you ready to go to the city described here in this chapter? How do you know you will be given access to this city?
- What does it mean to add to or take away from this prophecy?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the hope you have of an eternity in His presence.
- Ask God to help you to live each day with this hope before you.
- Thank the Lord that He has done all that is required for you to enter into the Holy City.
- Take a moment to pray for a loved one or friend who has not yet accepted the Lord and His offer of salvation.





## PUTTING BACK THE PIECES

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We have, in the course of this study, taken apart each of the individual chapters and sections. Let me conclude here with a brief statement about the book as a whole.

To begin we need to understand that the book of Revelation is divided into seven major sections. I would divide the book as follows:

1. Introduction and Letters to the Seven Churches 1:1-3:22
2. The Seven Seals 4:1-8:5
3. The Seven Trumpets 8:6-11:19
4. The Woman and the Dragon 12:1-14:20
5. The Seven Bowls 15:1-16:21
6. Final Destruction of the Enemies of God 17:1-20:15
7. The New Jerusalem and Conclusion 21:1-22:21

Each of these sections has something significant to teach us. Let's consider each section briefly here.

*The Seven Churches*

This section of the book of Revelation was written to literal churches that existed in the time of John. It teaches us, however, about the dangers we may encounter as the church faces the persecution of the end times. Each of the seven churches was facing a period of testing. They are given to us as an example for our reflection. What was the temptation of these churches in the midst of their persecution? In the midst of her trial, the church of Ephesus lost her first love. The church of Smyrna faced poverty and the martyrdom of one of her members but was a victorious church. Pergamum fell into false doctrine. Thyatira was misled into immorality. Sardis fell asleep. Philadelphia, though severely weakened, was kept by God who would not let her face more than she could handle. The church in Laodicea became lukewarm. Each of these churches gives us either a warning or encouragement as we face the persecution that will come as the Day of the Lord draws near.

*The Seven Seals*

The second section of the book of Revelation teaches us an antichrist will come who will seek to draw as many as possible away from the truth. We can expect to see an increase in war, famine, plague, and persecution as these days approach. There will be signs in the sky and an increase of natural disasters announcing the return of our Lord. One hundred and forty-four thousand will be sealed as witnesses in a great tribulation that will break out on the earth. Many believers will die and enter the presence of the Lord during this time.

*The Seven Trumpets*

This third section teaches us that there will be a great judgment of God on the earth. The earth, the sea, the waters, and the sky will be partly destroyed. Unbelievers will suffer tremendously. God's people, however, will be kept by God. The one hundred and forty-four thousand and God's two faithful witnesses will serve Him faithfully as witnesses to an unbelieving world.

*The Woman and the Dragon*

In this section we see that Satan, as the enemy of God, will do his best to destroy the work of God. He sought to kill the Lord Jesus but was not successful. He turned his attention to the church and will continue to oppose it to the end. He will enlist the help of the beast (Antichrist). During the time of the beast, the saints will see the power of Satan at work. He will be successful in deceiving many through signs and wonders. God's chosen people, however, will not be deceived. During this time we can expect a great persecution of the church on the earth. God will be victorious, however, and there will be a harvest of the earth. Believers will be taken to be with the Lord and God will judge His enemies.

*The Seven Bowls*

This section begins a series of judgments directed against the enemies of God. God will judge those who have worshipped the beast. The sea and the waters of the earth will be destroyed. The heat of the sun will scorch the inhabitants of the earth. The kingdom of the beast will be cast into darkness. Satan will move out to gather the nations for a final battle against the Lord.

*The Final Destruction of the Enemies of God*

In this section we see that God will destroy each of His enemies. Babylon, the Beast, the False Prophet, the Dragon, the unbeliever, and death itself will all be defeated by God. This section is a real encouragement to us. God is sovereign over all. He will be victorious over every enemy.

*The New Jerusalem*

This final section gives us a glance at what is in store for those who love the Lord and persevere to the end. This section describes for us the New Jerusalem and the reign of Christ in that city. Those who persevere will reign in that city forever free from sin, death and Satan.

While things will not be easy for the believer as the Day of the Lord approaches, we know that victory belongs to the Lamb. This prophecy is the story of the victory of the Lamb of God. What He began at the cross will be completed. Every enemy will be defeated. God will overcome and those who belong to Him will be eternally rewarded. What hope we have knowing that victory belongs to us through the Lamb who was slain for us at Calvary?

The book of Revelation is a warning to all who do not know the forgiveness of Christ in their lives. There is no hope in sin. Victory only belongs to those who trust in the Lord Jesus. If you are reading this commentary and do not know Him as your Lord and Saviour today, I invite you now to open your heart to Him. Seek His forgiveness and put your confidence fully in Him.

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