

DANIEL/REVELATION

FOR BEGINNERS

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21st Century Christin

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1.

SETTING THE STAGE

This is a study of the book of Revelation. Revelation is a book full of symbolism and imagery not familiar to the western mind. It was written in a style of writing called “apocalyptic.” The word *apocalypse* comes from a Greek word that means “an uncovering.”

The Apocalyptic literary style was used by Old Testament prophets when prophesying concerning world events. For example, the fall of a nation, great disasters or God’s judgment.

There were several characteristics of this style of writing which were similar from one author to another:

- It was used in times of suffering and persecution.
- The action was intense and emotional. The present suffering was acute and the future salvation would be dramatic.
- In addition to symbolic language the writers spoke of dreams and visions.
- Writers told stories using celestial characters and bodies (angels, demons, moon and stars).

When we begin our study of the book of Revelation you will recognize this type of language throughout. In our review of the period when Revelation was written you will note that it was a time of intense persecution for the Church from within as well as from outside forces.

Most scholars agree that John used this style of writing in this book in order to keep the Church's persecutors (the Romans) from understanding its message. If you were not Jewish, if you had no knowledge of the Old Testament or Hebrew symbolism, you could not discern the true meaning behind the images and symbols.

We are in similar circumstances today. In order to understand Revelation we must first review some Old Testament material where many of these images and references are found (over 400 references but no direct quotes). We also need to examine Jewish symbolism and numerology in order to get to the message behind the images.

Much of the information we need comes from the book of Daniel (although Ezekiel contains many of the same images).

And so, any serious study of the book of Revelation begins with an understanding of Daniel. Therefore, we will begin with Daniel and move to Revelation after we are finished.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan (Israel) in approximately 1410 BC. For the next 300 years they conquered the nations living there and established themselves.

In 1060 BC Saul became the first king of a united Israel (12 tribes). In 1020 BC David became king, subdued the entire land and extended the borders of the kingdom from the Egyptian

desert in the south to the Euphrates River in the north; from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the desert in the east. In 980 BC Solomon became king and for 40 years Israel enjoys a golden period of peace and prosperity during which the temple was built in Jerusalem.

After Solomon died, the kingdom was divided in two (940 BC):

- The Northern kingdom was made up of 10 tribes. Shechem was its capital for a time, then Penuel, then Tirzah.
- The Southern kingdom was made up of two tribes with its capital in Jerusalem.

The two were never reunited and competed for dominance in the region. After the split there was a decline in moral and religious fervor in both kingdoms as periods of high and low fidelity to the Lord followed one upon another.

During Israel's development from 1400 BC to its divided kingdom in the 9th century, the Assyrian nation dominated the world scene politically and militarily. Their capital was to the north, in Nineveh, and the Jews often had to pay tribute or fight off this strong and wicked neighbor.

In 722 BC the Assyrians attacked and destroyed the Northern kingdom and scattered the people throughout other nations and brought many into exile to Assyria. They also brought foreigners to live in the North and mix with the remaining Jews. The result was that the Northern kingdom's population was mixed with foreign nations and lost its pure Jewish blood and heritage. These "mixed" Jews were eventually called Samaritans by the Southern kingdom and despised because of their mixed blood, their mixed religion (pagan/Judaism) and their collaboration with enemies against the South in times of war.

Meanwhile, on the world stage, a new power emerged to challenge Assyrian supremacy and in 612 the Babylonians destroyed Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, and established themselves as world rulers.

In 606 BC the Babylonian army led by future king Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and carried off the main leaders, nobles, and royalty to Babylon where they began 70 years of captivity which was the subject of prophecies made by Jeremiah in 626 (20 years before the fact).

Among the leaders and young nobles carried off at this time was a young man named Daniel who would grow in importance and prestige in the foreign king's court because of his ability to interpret dreams and prophesy. Also taken away at this time was Ezekiel the prophet.

God allowed His people to be taken away into exile but He provided for their spiritual needs: Daniel in the palace was influencing the king with his special gifts, Ezekiel lived among the people and ministered to them with his teaching and his prophecies.

Twenty years later, in 586 BC, after the king who had been left in charge of the Southern kingdom by the Babylonians rebelled (Zedekiah), the Babylonians returned to Jerusalem and destroyed the temple and the city and carried off even more Jews into captivity. The Babylonian system was to carry off the leaders and retrain them in Babylonian culture, religion and politics, and return these people (after 20-30 years) to their homelands to rule under their administration.

In 539 BC, the Medes conquered the Babylonians and the new world leader was a man called Cyrus who became king in 536 BC. In that same period this king released the Jews to return to their homeland and provided them with help to begin rebuilding the

temple and the city. During this time (534 BC) Daniel died while in captivity in Babylon, now controlled by the Medes.

From about 500 to 332 BC, the Medes shared world power with another mighty nation, Persia (Medo-Persian Empire).

It is during the reign of the Persian kings that the city of Jerusalem was completed, the temple was rebuilt, Ezra reestablished the Law, Malachi prophesied to the people who had resettled in Jerusalem, and Nehemiah returned to rebuild the wall (486-400 BC). Old Testament history ends in 400 BC with the work of the prophet Malachi. There are two other historic events that take place that have great significance for the world and also for the coming of Jesus and the spread of the gospel.

1. Alexander the Great conquers Persia in 331 BC and Greece becomes the new world power. Alexander dies soon after (323 BC) in Babylon with a broken heart because there are no other nations to conquer.
2. In 146 BC Rome destroys Carthage and puts an end to Greek dominance and will become the new world power for the next 500 years.

It is important to understand that there is a story within a story going on here:

1. There is the story of the Jews: their kingdoms being destroyed by foreign armies, their people being carried off and two of their people (Ezekiel and Daniel) writing about the experience.
2. There is the story of world kingdoms: through the Bible accounts of the experiences of the Jews we can trace the rise and fall of five world powers (which historical records

confirm): Assyrian, Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman.

The significance of this is important for several reasons:

1. Much of Daniel's visions, dream interpretations and prophecy will chronicle the rise and fall of these world powers and the eventual coming of the Christian age at its proper point in history. Exact historical prophecy that can be verified through history books is one of the strongest proofs for the inspiration of Scripture. In 605 BC Daniel begins to predict the rise and fall of 4 world powers into the next 600 years.
2. The language, symbols and prophecy are directly related to the meaning and interpretation of the book of Revelation.

And so we begin studying Revelation by studying the book of Daniel because its history, prophecy, language and images relate directly to similar features in the book of Revelation.

SUMMARY

The Book of Daniel was written by Daniel who was a young Jewish man from the upper classes of society in Jerusalem. He was carried off into Babylonian captivity in 606 BC and wrote this material between 606 and 534 BC when he died. His main abilities were in interpreting dreams, visions and prophecy. His book was written in two languages (Aramaic and Hebrew).

Daniel is divided into three sections:

1. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the entire book.

2. Chapters 2 to 6 describe Daniel, his three companions and the experiences they encounter in Babylon.
3. Chapters 7 to 12 narrate visions that Daniel has concerning world powers and their relationship to the kingdom of God.

2.

DANIEL IN BABYLON

We are studying the book of Daniel as a way of understanding the background information, imagery and symbolism that is contained in the book of Revelation.

Much of the apocalyptic style of writing found in Daniel is also found in Revelation; understanding one helps us understand the other. Much of the prophecy in Daniel is fulfilled in Revelation as well.

Both Daniel and Revelation speak to a primary audience (believers) as well as address issues on the world stage (successive world powers and Roman persecution).

Daniel was a young man from a well to do family in Jerusalem who was carried off into captivity by the newest world power emerging at that time, Babylon, and its greatest king, Nebuchadnezzar.

BABYLON THE CITY AND EMPIRE

Babylon was the greatest city and empire in the pre-Christian era. Assyrians ruled longer, but their cities were not as great or beautiful. Babylon was ruled for most of its time by

Nebuchadnezzar (45 years in all) who never tired of beautifying and improving its great capital city.

Ancient historians say that the walls around the city were 60 miles long (15 miles on each side). The walls were 300 feet high, 80 feet thick and 35 feet into the ground so enemies could not tunnel under. All were made of brick. There was 1/4 mile of cleared space around the wall where a mote was built. There were 250 towers, 100 gates of brass and sentries posted everywhere. The city of Babylon was an impregnable fort. The city itself was divided by the Euphrates River that flowed through it and there were draw-bridges to get across. There were 53 temples and 180 altars to the goddess Ishtar (goddess of war and love).

Nebuchadnezzar's palace was huge with walls 50 feet thick. Nebuchadnezzar also built one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: *the hanging gardens of Babylon*. He built these for his queen. The gardens were 400 square foot platforms held up by arches that cascaded down one from another. They were filled with flowers, trees, and shrubs and were all watered from a reservoir at the top fed by hydraulic pumps from the Euphrates River from below. Underneath the arches were luxurious apartments, the pleasure grounds of the palace. These were built while Daniel was the chief governor of the wise men of Babylon.

Isaiah (13:17-22) and Jeremiah (51:37-43) both prophesied that this great city would not only be destroyed but it would remain uninhabited forever. In 539 Cyrus, who had taken over Media, Persia, and Elam, led his army into Babylon and captured this seemingly indestructible city and nation without going into a long-protracted battle. The Medes simply diverted the flow of the Euphrates River and marched the army under the wall along the dry riverbed at night, capturing the Babylonian leaders by surprise.

It remained an important city throughout the reign of the Medo-Persian kings and even to the reign of Alexander the Great, but after his death the shift of power went to Rome and the city declined.

By the time of Christ it was mostly in ruins and, except for archaeological expeditions, it remains abandoned until this day, just as the prophets had said. It was into this city, this empire, that Daniel and several of his friends were brought for retraining and reeducation by Nebuchadnezzar.

BOOK OF DANIEL

The book of Daniel presents Daniel (7:1, 28) as its author. It was confirmed as Daniel's work by Jesus Himself in Matthew (24:15). It was also accepted by Jews and early Christians and this view was unanimously held until the rise of "Modern Criticism" that contended that it was written in the 2nd Century before Christ by an unknown author. This theory has been rejected by scholars (both Jewish and Christian).

The book is written in two languages: Chaldean or Aramaic which was the diplomatic language of that era (2:4-7:28) and the Hebrew language for the balance. This is what might be expected from a book written for Jews living in Babylon, containing information describing their actual experience in Babylon and references to their own Jewish past and future.

OUTLINE – DANIEL

- The court of Nebuchadnezzar – 1:1-21
- Nebuchadnezzar's dream – 2:1-49
- Four episodes in Daniel's life – 3:1- 6:28
- Four visions of Daniel's prophesy – 7:1-12:13

DANIEL THE PERSON

Daniel was of a noble family, probably of royal blood. Josephus says that he was probably kin to King Zedekiah of Judah, which is why he and his friends had access to the Babylonian court and were not placed with the people instead.

He rose to a position of great power because of his ability to interpret dreams, his visions and his great piety and faith in the Lord. He was a young man when he went into captivity and died an old man, still in Babylon 72 years later. He lasted through the reign of five kings beginning with Nebuchadnezzar and lasting to the reigns of Darius the Persian and Cyrus the Mede in 534 BC. Even though the Jews returned home after 70 years, he remained until his death. He was God's witness in the palace that ruled the world during his lifetime.

THE COURT OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god.

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, ⁴ youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the

literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. ⁶ Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego.

⁸ But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. ⁹ Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials,¹⁰ and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age?

Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king."

¹¹ But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see."

¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. ¹⁶ So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.

¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.

¹⁸ Then at the end of the days which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁹ The king talked with them, and out of them all not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's personal service.

²⁰ As for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm. ²¹ And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king."

- Daniel 1:1-21

Note that in a compact first chapter Daniel summarizes the reason why he and three others are now in the palace of the king. Part of their training was to immerse them into Babylonian culture, this included eating their food. The young Jews accepted (and excelled) at the academic training but refused to eat the food: food sacrificed to idols, food not prepared in "kosher" style, some of the food may have been considered "unclean."

Of course this test of faith results in the Lord's blessing them so that they maintained their right to eat without violating their conscience, and they succeeded in impressing the king and securing very high positions in the palace.

LESSONS

- Decide in advance that you will obey God so you will not be pressured on the day of testing.
- God tests us with trials and with opportunities (opportunity to get ahead if we break some minor rules).
- God always rewards obedience, sooner or later. He did it sooner with Daniel, later with Jesus.
- You never know why God has put you where you are; why the test is what it is.

Daniel's impact lasted centuries, but he did not know it then. You never know if the doing of right in your humdrum routine might have tremendous impact later (or the reverse: avoiding confessing Christ, or avoiding to do right might eliminate you from contributing mightily to the Kingdom).

In any case, we see that Daniel's position is secured with God and with the king by the way he conducts himself in the early stages.

DANIEL 2:1-49 – NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

This chapter describes the beginning of Daniel's ministry of prophecy in the king's court. What takes place is the following:

The king has an unusual dream that makes him anxious since he does not understand it. The Babylonians were adept in the black arts, the occult and magic. They would try to foretell the future by reading the stars or cutting open animals and "reading" their

inner organs; they also put much importance in dreams and their meaning.

The king calls his “wise men”, a collection of sorcerers, astrologers, counselors and ministers to give him the interpretation of the dream. The catch is that he does not tell them what the dream is. They must tell him the dream and interpret it.

He tells them that if no one can do this they will all be executed and their homes destroyed; this included Daniel and his three friends who were part of the court’s advisors. The wise men confess that they cannot and so the king orders the decree that all wise men are to be executed. When Daniel hears this, he and the three other Jewish youths go to God in prayer and God reveals the dream and its interpretation to them. Daniel then goes to the king with his revelation and saves himself and the others (since he was considered one of the wise men by the king).

³¹ You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. ³² The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴ You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶“This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king. ³⁷You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; ³⁸and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

³⁹After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

⁴⁰Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. ⁴¹In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. ⁴²As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. ⁴³And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.

⁴⁴In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver

and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

- Daniel 2:31-45

In the interpretation of this dream, Daniel not only discovers the king's mind but he also prophesies concerning world events that will take place in the next 650 years.

THE DREAM:

A great statue: the head is of gold, the breast of silver as well as arms, the belly and hips of brass, legs of iron and the feet a mixture of iron and clay. A stone appears, cut without hands, and strikes the feet of the statue. The statue crumbles to dust and is blown away. The statue grows into a mountain which fills the earth.

THE INTERPRETATION:

The head is gold and is the embodiment of the kingdom of Babylon: the first great and magnificent world kingdom. (The Assyrians also ruled before them but not with the splendor and wealth and total control of the Babylonians.) The breast and arms of silver represent well the dual nature of the Medo-Persian Empire that conquered and replaced the Babylonians. Also, silver coinage and this people's wealth in silver fits the imagery in the dream as well as the two arms or two nations ruling as one.

The belly and hips of brass refer to Alexander the Great and the Greek nation who will become the next world power after the Medo-Persians. Alexander innovated warfare by introducing brass armor in combat.

The Roman Empire is described as legs of iron with feet of mixed clay and iron. The Romans introduced iron weapons in warfare.

At the beginning they were tough and unbreakable like iron legs. As the Empire grew, however, it began making alliances with other nations (rather than conquering and ruling them by force). This is represented by the feet mixed with iron and clay.

The stone cut without hands refers to a supernatural source. The small stone totally destroys the statue and conquers its essence and substance (power, control, dominance, glory, etc.). The stone is the kingdom established by God, never to be destroyed and always alive and growing. It will eventually dominate everything and last forever.

Once Nebuchadnezzar hears this he falls on his face to honor Daniel as a true prophet and worships the God of Daniel. He also makes Daniel the head of all wise men and counselors in the palace and his three friends the administrators of the province of Babylon.

SUMMARY

This is a tremendous prophecy because of its clarity and exactness. He said that this dream was about the future rulers of the world. He gives the exact number there will be as well as their order and enough information from the dream to identify them. He prophesies correctly about the coming of the church and at what exact period of time (Roman) it would appear, destroy the opposition and continue its growth. He even correctly interprets the idea that none of these kingdoms would ever revive (all blown into dust).

Jesus, the Apostles, and the last 2,000 years have confirmed that the church, the kingdom of God on earth, the stone cut without hands, continues to grow filling the earth long after these other kingdoms have dried up and blown away.

This section is important not only to prove the inspiration of the Bible, but also to set the scene for what will take place in Revelation. Revelation describes the actual stone striking the base of the statue. The conflict between Rome and the church is described in Revelation. Revelation continues the prophecy originally made in Daniel but completed in the time period when John writes the book of Revelation. It is not an instant destruction but rather a struggle begun in the first century that will go on for several hundred years that will finally end in victory for the church.

3.

FOUR EPISODES IN DANIEL'S LIFE

We are reviewing the book of Daniel in preparation for our study of the book of Revelation. Here is an outline of the book:

1. The court of Nebuchadnezzar – 1:1-21

The Jewish boys, Daniel and three friends are in captivity and training in the Babylonian palace. They are placed in high positions.

2. Nebuchadnezzar's dream – 2:1-49

In his dream, the king sees a great statue made of gold, silver, brass, iron and clay which is then destroyed by a stone hitting the feet of the statue and turning it to dust which is blown away. Daniel comes forward to discern the dream and interpret it. From historical records we know that he was correct:

- The golden head was Babylon.
- The silver chest and arms were the Medo-Persian Empire.
- The brass belly and hips were the Greeks.

- The iron legs and feet mixed with iron and clay were the Romans.
- The stone was Christ and His church that appeared during the Roman period and eventually grew to cover the earth while all of the kingdoms before it have been crushed and have disappeared from the world scene.

From this point on Daniel and his three friends are given a high position in the court of Nebuchadnezzar.

3. Four episodes in Daniel's life – 3:1-6:28

We will begin discussing in this chapter.

4. Four visions in Daniel's prophecy – 7:1-12:13

This section is a more detailed vision concerning the earlier prophecy regarding the world powers that were to come in the future.

For this chapter let us look at Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to Daniel's interpretation of his dream.

These four important events cover a period of about sixty years and the majority of Daniel's record. We will review all four of these in this chapter.

EPIISODE #1

CHAPTER 3 – THE FIERY FURNACE

According to the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament with historical notes) this event took place in the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign after Daniel had been in Babylon about 18 years. This was the same year that Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem a second time in order to

burn it down and destroy the temple. It is interesting that Daniel does not appear in this event.

1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. 3 Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, 5 that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. 6 But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire." 7 Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

- Daniel 3:1-7

Some claim that Nebuchadnezzar got the idea of the statue from the dream. Making and refurbishing public shrines and statues were part of the king's duty. DURA is an unknown sight in the

Babylonian flat river area. Archaeologists have found very large pedestals that could have been the base of the statue. The idea was to put it in the flatlands so it could be seen from afar gleaming in the sunlight (9 feet. base by 90 feet high).

The king was to use the unveiling of the statue as an opportunity to test the loyalty and submissiveness of his court and ministers. He calls and tells them to bow down and they do. Of course, this presents a problem for the three friends of Daniel because, like the pagan food, this type of worship was a violation of their faith. To do this, even to appease the king, was to sin against God.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to do this and their detractors (others jealous of their position) accuse these men of insubordination to the king. The king is furious but because they have served him well, he permits them to explain themselves. These faithful men tell the king that their confidence is in God to save them and whether He does so or not does not matter, they will not do this.

The king demands that they be thrown into a large brick kiln (oven), heated to the maximum which would leave not even any ashes of their body (an abomination even for pagans). The king observes that the three are joined by a fourth person (an angel of the Lord) and that the fire is not affecting them at all.

When they are released, Nebuchadnezzar decrees that the religion of these men become a “protected religion” and rewards the three with even higher positions.

LESSONS

1. Whether God heals us or not, answers our prayer or not, gives us prosperity or not, He is still God and deserves our trust and obedience.

2. You will have your chance to witness for Christ. Everybody gets an opportunity to publicly show their faith, even if it is not as dramatic as this. It is not always life or death, but it is always a test to confess Christ or deny Him.
3. God is always with you, even if it seems He has let you down. The angel was a sign that God would be with them in death, even if this time He was sparing them for His own purposes.

EPISODE #2

CHAPTER 4 – NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S MADNESS AND RECOVERY

In this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar recounts the events of his madness and recovery: He has a dream where a great tree is present and ultimately cut down to a stump. Daniel tells him that the tree represents him and that because of his pride, his sanity will be taken from him and he will have the mind of an animal for seven periods (Lycanthropy, a form of schizophrenia). The Babylonians counted only summer and winter so this would be a period of about 3.5 years.

Daniel also appeals to the king to repent of his sins and do good deeds to avoid this punishment from God.

Apparently, the king does not do so and a year later as he is walking on the roof of his palace, contemplating his own achievements and greatness, he is struck with this madness. The Babylonians believed that madness was a form of divine madness. There are inscriptions by Nebuchadnezzar that have been found. Thousands of large bricks that tell of all his great victories and works, they were used to construct buildings, etc. One of his writings mentions a period of four years where he did no public works and where he did not delight in his kingdom.

With time he recognizes his sin and acknowledges that God is the true ruler of the world and this includes kings. After this realization and confession, he is restored to health, his position and splendor.

It is interesting to trace the progression of Nebuchadnezzar's faith, beginning with a fierce, pagan, proud ruler:

1. After Daniel interprets his original dream, he acknowledges that God is stronger than all the gods. He is still a polytheist who has added the Lord to his list of gods.
2. After the furnace he declares that worship to this powerful God is good and should be protected. Now he is a sympathetic polytheist.
3. After the second dream and his recovery from madness, he himself now worships God and declares Him to be eternal, all-powerful and sovereign. He actually prophesizes himself. He now believes.

This is a good lesson for us who are discouraged about converting family and friends or the effect of the gospel on powerful people.

EPISODE #3

CHAPTER 5 – BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST

We now fast-forward to the very last night of the Babylonian kingdom. Daniel has now been there 70 years. Nebuchadnezzar is dead and a man named Nabonidus has inherited rule, but since he would prefer other pursuits he leaves the throne in the hands of Belshazzar, his son.

Belshazzar decides to organize a lavish feast in his own honor and as the food and especially the wine is flowing, he demands that the vessels that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem be brought out for display and common usage for their party.

This, of course, was a sacrilege to Jewish eyes and all done out of pride and with the purpose of showing how powerful they were, having destroyed the temple of the Jews and their God.

While this was going on, a man's hand appeared and began to write on the wall opposite them. This frightened the king and so he called on his "wise men" to interpret the writing on the wall, promising them the third highest position in the kingdom for the one who could do it (his father was first and he was second).

No one can and Daniel is brought in to solve the mystery. He refuses the reward but interprets the message. Before he does so, however, he reminds Belshazzar of Nebuchadnezzar's experiences with God and the lessons learned, lessons which Belshazzar has refused to learn and which have brought him to this point.

The inscription was a series of symbols for Aramaic weights and measures, A MINA, A MINA, A SCHEKEL, and FRACTIONS. The word interpretation: NUMBERED (minas were counted in units); WEIGHED (shekels were measured by weight); FRACTIONS (represented division). The literal interpretation: God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it; God has weighed you in the balance and you have been found wanting; your kingdom will be divided (and given to the Medes and Persians). Belshazzar is disturbed by this and still offers the honor to Daniel and declares him to be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Inscriptions found by archaeologists tell us that this took place on October 12, 539 BC. That night the Medes led by Darius (one of Cyrus' commanders) diverted the flow of the Euphrates, and

led by two Babylonian deserters, marched their army under the walls along the dry riverbed. They captured the city without a battle while the king and leaders were drunk at their feast. Darius reigned for about two years while Cyrus was fighting other battles in the north. Eventually Cyrus came to claim the rule of Babylon.

One good lesson for us from this episode is that we should be careful to learn from the mistakes of the past. Belshazzar was defeated because he refused to honor God or apply the lessons from the past to his present life.

EPISODE #4

CHAPTER 6 – DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN

Daniel, perhaps because he had prophesied concerning their victory, is now placed with two others into cabinet positions over the 120 governors who would rule over the entire nation. This position and his superior abilities provoke jealousy among the other ministers and governors. They want him out, so they devise a plan to attack him on his religious beliefs and practices which are different than their own.

Their strategy was to create a law which in effect made the king the supreme high priest for a month. This would show his authority in every dimension because no prayer, no petition, no religious function could be performed without his blessing for a certain period of time. The plot was to accuse Daniel of defying this law through his daily habit of private prayer. The law was punishable by death and under Persian custom, royal decrees could not be changed nor exceptions be made. Of course Daniel is once again faced with the decision of honoring God or forfeiting his position and his life.

The lions were kept by Persian kings for sport. They would hunt and kill them on royal land to demonstrate their sovereignty over man and beast (king of men, king of beasts).

Daniel (now about 90 years old, contrary to pictures of a young Daniel) is placed in the den and unharmed. This pleases the king because he respected Daniel and realized the plot too late to change anything. After Daniel is removed from the den, the ministers and governors who participated in the plot are executed along with their families. The chapter ends with Darius glorifying God and rewarding Daniel like Nebuchadnezzar before him.

SUMMARY

We have reviewed four episodes in Daniel's life that showed his and his friends' faith and courage, God rescuing them over and over again and pagan kings brought to faith or punished by a King who was demonstrated as being greater than they.

All this happened to affect several people:

1. Daniel and his friends were vindicated by their faith in God.
2. The kings and leaders in Babylon came to know and honor the true God who raises up kings and kingdoms and has the power to destroy them and their idols.
3. The Jews, who were in Babylonian captivity, saw their city and the temple where God dwelled destroyed and overrun by pagans. They had to put up with the boast of their captors that the power of their gods was greater than the power of the God of the Jews. (And their captivity and destruction of Jerusalem was pretty convincing proof).

However, through Daniel's life and the very high-profile events that I have just described, God was able to help His people maintain their faith despite their defeat. God was still in charge and still working in their lives as well as in the lives of their captors.

In this way the Jews, while in captivity, were able to maintain the spirit and practice of their religion.

4.

FOUR VISIONS OF DANIEL'S PROPHECIES

In the final part of his book Daniel will describe dreams and visions that he had concerning events that were mentioned in the original dream of Nebuchadnezzar. In that dream he saw the overview of history for the next 600 years and beyond. The visions he has now will give more details concerning the events he foresaw in Nebuchadnezzar's original dream.

THE VISIONS

The balance of Daniel's book contains four visions concerning world powers, but also other visions of future events and an appearance of God's angel.

First, I will give you an overview of the next 6 chapters then we will go into detail about the visions and their historical fulfillment. Here is what it looks like as a chart.

Ch. 2	Ch. 7	Ch. 8	Ch. 9	Ch. 10	Ch. 11	Ch. 12	
BABYLON	BABYLON		70 W E E K S	A N G E L			
MEDO-PERSIAN	MEDO-PERSIAN						
GREECE	GREECE	GREECE				GREECE	
ROME	ROME					ROME	ROME
KINGDOM OF GOD	KINGDOM OF GOD						KINGDOM OF GOD

Chapter 2 – The original dream describing the future kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman, kingdom of God. These were represented by the image of a statue.

Chapter 7 – In the first vision Daniel sees the same kingdoms, but this time he sees them as beasts. Remembering this avoids confusion.

1. Lion – Babylon
2. Bear – Medo-Persian
3. Leopard – Greece
4. Terrible Beast – Rome
5. The Lord and saints – Kingdom of God

Chapter 8 – More information concerning the second and third kingdoms, especially their struggle for power. The Medo-Persian Empire represented as a two-horned ram and the Greek shown as a swift he-goat with one great horn. Daniel describes the victory by the he-goat and his subsequent demise and replacements.

Chapter 9 – Is a prophecy more than a vision. In this chapter Daniel recognizes that the captivity of the Jews predicted to be for 70 years is now over and he prays and urges their return based on Jeremiah’s prophecy. He also makes a prophecy about

the future duration of the Jewish nation in terms of 70 weeks. We will examine this from an historical perspective and look at Jewish numerology.

Chapter 10 – An angel appears to Daniel and prepares him for more visions to come. He also provides a certain insight into the struggle taking place and the spiritual discussion between God’s angels and Satan’s demons.

Chapter 11 – This chapter predicts events that will take place between the rise and fall of the Greek and Roman Empires.

When the Greek Empire was in decline after Alexander’s death, his empire was divided among his four generals. One of these generals received control of Egypt and Palestine. This region was in great turmoil during this time as regional powers (Syrians in the north) fought southern kings (Egypt) for control. These local wars took place before Rome took over and eventually seized control of all the regions putting an end to all conflict. Daniel, however, prophesizes concerning the outcome of these regional struggles centuries before they took place.

Chapter 12 – The final chapter summarizes the conflict between the last great world power and the kingdom of God, the church. Daniel correctly sees the victory of the saints after much persecution by the 4th kingdom.

Our problem with these chapters is determining the exact time that Daniel is referring to. Some visions of prophecy can be taken literally or symbolically, they fit either way. Some prophecies have primary, secondary and even final fulfillments.

For example:

- Primary fulfillment in Daniel’s day (King’s madness)
- Secondary fulfillment in history (Greek, Rome, etc.)

- Final fulfillment at the end of time (Second coming)

The visions and symbols can be flexible as to when they find their final interpretation.

For example, do they just point to the destruction of Rome and the beginning of the church? Do they refer to the destruction of Satan's forces and the Antichrist and the second coming of Jesus?

Our goal is to explain the meanings and help readers understand the possible indications and interpretations of each.

DANIEL 7 – THE 4 BEASTS

Chapter 7 is a continuation of the vision and prophecy found in chapter 2, except now the statue is replaced with the imagery of four beasts.

The chapter is divided into two sections: verses 1-15 the vision itself and verse 16-28 the interpretation.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind as he lay on his bed; then he wrote the dream down and related the following summary of it. ² Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much

meat!' ⁶ After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷ After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

⁸ While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

⁹ "I kept looking
Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;
His vesture was like white snow
And the hair of His head like pure wool.
His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.

¹⁰ "A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him;
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him;
The court sat,
And the books were opened.

¹¹ Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but

an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time.

¹³ "I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.

¹⁴ "And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every
language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.

¹⁵ "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within
me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me.
- Daniel 7:1-15

The first year of Belshazzar suggests that Daniel is recording something which took place in the past, about 555 BC. He begins with a description of the four beasts.

1. A lion with wings who loses them, stands on hind legs and given the heart of a man.
2. A bear standing upright favoring one side with three ribs in its mouth and a voice telling it to devour.
3. A leopard with four wings, four heads. Dominion is given to it.
4. A terrible beast, strong with iron teeth, destructive, with ten horns. Three horns are removed for a little horn

which becomes more powerful than the others. This other horn has eyes, and a mouth speaking blasphemy.

5. God's throne on blazing wheels (God is everywhere, judges quickly). Books are opened and the beast is destroyed. The Son of Man appears and is given dominion forever.

“approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ “These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.”

¹⁹ “Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, ²⁰ and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. ²¹ I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.

²³ “Thus he said: “The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all

the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. ²⁴ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. ²⁶ But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. ²⁷ Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

²⁸ "At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself."

- Daniel 7:16-28

These verses contain Daniel's interpretation. Four beasts referred to as kings who embody the kingdom they represent. He does not give any information about the first three but he is curious about the fourth beast. The horns represent 10 kings and the little horn that uproots three of those ten kings. This little horn will blaspheme against God and wear out the saints for a TIME, TIMES, ½ TIME. The saints will eventually conquer and inherit an everlasting kingdom.

Now the historical setting for this vision is given by Daniel himself within his book. He tells us that the first kingdom is Babylon. We also know that God's kingdom begins during the reign of the fourth kingdom. The middle kingdoms (Medo-Persian and Greek) are explained in chapter 8.

We have historical information about these kingdoms that help us understand Daniel's vision:

1. Vision regarding Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar's palace was adorned with lions with wings which fits with the vision. The plucking of the wings could refer to his madness and loss of rulership for a time. The giving of a human heart to an animal can refer to the point where he was healed after he repented and began to acknowledge and worship God.

2. Vision regarding Medo-Persian Empire

The image of a bear favoring one side refers to the Medo-Persian Empire where one side of a dual natured kingdom was stronger than the other (Persians eventually were superior). The Medo-Persians were more aggressive and conquered more territory than the Babylonians.

3. Vision regarding the Greek

The leopard, swift and powerful represents well the quickness of the Alexandrian conquest of the world in 12 years. The four heads refer to the four generals that took over and divided among themselves Alexander's empire after his death. Dominion given to it confirms that Alexander had complete control. Each kingdom gets progressively bigger.

4. Vision regarding Rome

Rome was the last world empire after Greece. It was the most vicious and powerful. What it did not conquer and loot, it merely destroyed.

The significance of the horns is the following. Before Christ, Rome was ruled as a republic. After Julius Caesar, Rome was ruled by single emperors beginning with Augustus through Domitian who was the eleventh ruler, the little horn. The three horns displaced to make room for him could refer to “house emperors,” co-conspirators with Domitian who were later killed. The eyes and voice of the little horn suggest that the empire was embodied by this one person.

Daniel says that this horn blasphemes God and historical records show that Domitian ordered his subjects to refer to him as Lord and God while he was alive.

5. Vision regarding the kingdom of God

The next scene shows the throne of God surrounded by angels who destroy the terrible beast.

Although Rome did not fall on Pentecost Sunday, when the church was established, this was the beginning of the end with the last gasp coming some three centuries later. Verse 25 “Time, times and 1/2 time” refers to an indefinite amount of time over which these things will happen. A period of time, followed by a period twice as long, followed by a period cut short.

Rome was the last world empire succeeded by the kingdom of God. Daniel prophesied that no other kingdom would dominate the world or the church. Many have tried and failed. Napoleon failed, Kaiser failed, Hitler failed, USSR failed. At the moment the USA is the strongest world power but it does not rule the world. It cannot, not because of the US or European unity or Sharia. It cannot because God’s Word through Daniel says that Rome was the last world empire and it was destroyed by the kingdom of God. We see the results today. Rome lays in the dust for 1700 years and the church continues to grow and covers the world.

Daniel does not give the details (*Revelation* does) but merely states that the terrible beast (same reference in *Revelation*) is judged and destroyed by God's throne, His saints and the appearance of His Son.

LESSONS

Here are two important lessons from this chapter:

1. FULFILLED PROPHECY IS THE SUREST SIGN OF THE BIBLE'S INSPIRATION.

The only way these things could be seen is if an Almighty and Eternal God revealed it to man and he recorded it. There is no other way to explain this phenomenon. It is beyond coincidence, beyond informed guess, impossible to manipulate. The only conclusion is inspiration by an all knowing and eternal being.

We believe that the Bible is God's Word because it is filled with fulfilled prophecy only available through divine revelation.

2. GOD'S WORD IS SURE

If God says that the 11th king of an empire that will only exist 600 years into the future will sin in a certain way, be destroyed and his empire replaced, and it all happens... Then if He says "trust Me, I will provide", "believe in Jesus and you will be forgiven", "be faithful and you will be saved", then you can be sure it will happen.

God's Word is sure because it is **God's** word, not man's. We need to study it, know it, obey it and be assured that what it says will happen, good and bad.

5.

VISION WITHIN A VISION

One idea that we have learned about Daniel's book is that the central or recurring idea is the rise and fall of four great earthly kingdoms which are permanently replaced by God's kingdom.

The original vision of this is contained in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great statue. In subsequent visions Daniel will return to this prophecy and give more details about these kingdoms but use different symbols to describe them.

- The Medo-Persian Empire: chest of silver with two arms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream; bear with ribs in his mouth in first vision; ram with two horns in second vision.
- Greece: belly and hips of brass in Nebuchadnezzar's dream; leopard with wings in first vision and a he-goat with horn in the second vision.

As we move through a variety of images, symbols and characters, let us remember that he is always describing the rise and fall of these kingdoms and the coming of the church.

DANIEL 8 – STRUGGLE FOR POWER

The eighth chapter describes in more detail the struggle for power between the second and third kingdoms, Medo-Persia and Greece. These are presented as a two horned ram for the Medo-Persian Empire with the two horns representing its nature, and a very swift he-goat with one horn representing Alexander's speedy victories.

The he-goat charges and destroys the ram which describes Greece's victory over the Medes some two hundred years before either nation confronted each other.

Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

- Daniel 8:8

This passage prophesizes what happened after Alexander's death as his four generals divided and took control of his kingdom.

Verses 9 through 27 describe the rise of a smaller horn which would attack God's people and blaspheme God. I explained earlier that prophecies can have primary, secondary and final fulfillment. (Primary: in Daniel's lifetime; secondary: in the future sometime; final: specifically at the end of time). This prophecy can have secondary and final fulfillment.

The fulfillment of the "little horn" prophecy can have:

1. Secondary fulfillment (future sometime) - a reference to the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes who attacked the Jews (170 BC.), desecrated the temple, blasphemed God and led to the Maccabean uprising. Daniel will give more details about this person and time in chapter 11 as he describes the

“regional” wars between the Syrians in the north and Alexander’s general who controlled Egypt with Palestine as a pawn between the two.

2. Final fulfillment (end time) - this reference can also point to the end of time when a person in the “likeness” of Antiochus will come to blaspheme God and turn people away from Him. This would be the antichrist described by Paul in II Thessalonians.

We know that Daniel’s reference to the little horn is already fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes some 400 years later. Scholars debate if this prophecy was meant to refer to the antichrist as well.

DANIEL 9 – 70 WEEKS

In this chapter Daniel’s prophecy concerns the nation of Israel and the specific coming of the Messiah. Daniel uses the idea of 70 weeks to give the exact time when certain things will take place.

In verses 1 through 19 Daniel is praying and studying the word when he realizes that Jeremiah’s prophecy said that the people would be in captivity for 70 years and that time was rapidly drawing close. He prays that God will honor this word and return the people home to rebuild the city and temple.

“Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God,²¹ while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering.²² He gave me instruction and talked with me and said, “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you

insight with understanding. ²³ At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.

²⁴ “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. ²⁵ So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. ²⁶ Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. ²⁷ And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

- Daniel 9:20-27

God gives Daniel further understanding concerning the history and the future of the restored city of Jerusalem and the time of the arrival of the promised Messiah. This information is tied up in the expression of 70 weeks. From their perspective they could not solve this numerical mystery but from our viewpoint we can give clearer meaning to it.

What the seventy weeks exactly referred to depends on where and how you begin counting.

Many scholars think that the 70 weeks refers to 70 weeks of years. The number seven was used in significant ways from the beginning of Scriptures (7 days of creation; 70 years of captivity). It was a combination of 4 (representing the world North/East/South/West) and 3 (representing God), the combination of which represented perfection (God + His creation). 70 weeks (or 70 times 7 (7 days in a week) equaled 490 years). This idea comes from Ezekiel 4:6 where Ezekiel assigns one year for each day in a certain prophecy.

We need to be careful because there is nothing that tells us that the equation in Ezekiel's prophecy should be applied in Daniel's prophecy. The significance of the prophecy is that it refers to periods of time that certain things would happen.

Daniel divided these 70 weeks into 7 weeks, 62 weeks and 1 week; these refer to 3 main events in Jewish history left to happen as far as Daniel was concerned:

1. How long it would take to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple (from Daniel to the temple being rebuilt).
2. How long it would be until the Messiah would come (from the temple being rebuilt to Christ coming).
3. How long after the Messiah came would the end of His ministry and the end of the nation be (Christ to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple).

Scholars have tried to compute numbers to correspond with various historical events but are not in agreement. However, if we approach these numbers as representing general eras we see:

1. From the time Daniel made the prophecy to the temple's completion was approximately 50 years (7 weeks of years = 49 years).
2. From the time that Daniel made the prophecy to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, approximately five centuries (62 weeks to the coming of the Messiah = 434 years).
3. From the time of the Messiah's coming to the end of His ministry and death on the cross and the destruction of Jerusalem 30 AD – 70 AD (1 week – short period).

When dealing with numbers, prophets were more interested with acts, events and eras, so numbers indicated how many acts and the era they would take place.

Jeremiah prophesied exactly 70 years for the captivity; Daniel uses a symbolic number 70 weeks to foretell eras and generations. For more please visit:

bibletalk.tv/jewish-numerology

DANIEL 10 – ANGELS OF THE NATIONS

In verses 1-9, Daniel tells of a troubling period in his soul when he sees and has an exchange with an unnamed angel.

In verses 10-21, the angel reveals to Daniel some of the struggle taking place in the unseen realm of the spiritual world. The struggle is between angelic beings in the control and movement of nations in that period of time. Again Daniel is describing events that are related to these four kingdoms, but this time from a “behind the scenes” point of view.

The angel reveals the following:

- That his mission is to give Daniel yet another vision concerning his people and what would happen to them in the future. This vision will unfold in chapter 11.
- He reveals the angelic struggle between himself and other angels that guide or empower the nations that Daniel has spoken of in his visions (Persia, Greece, Israel).
- The angel tells him that he and Michael were struggling with the angel over Persia in preparation for the coming of the angel over Greece. This describes the future struggle between Persia and Greece.

We do not understand the nature of the struggle between these angelic beings (perhaps the angel over Persia was refusing to accept the demise of his protectorate and these other angels were there to prepare for the eventual destruction by Greece). In any event, the revelation shows Daniel that the order of world events is controlled by God and worked out by His messengers.

DANIEL 11 – KINGS OF THE NORTH AND SOUTH

In this chapter Daniel will see a vision that introduces some new elements to the scenario of the four kingdoms.

BACKGROUND

After the death of Alexander, his kingdom is divided among his four generals. Ptolemy Soter was the general who received the land of Egypt and he annexed Judea as part of his domain. This activity took place between 324 and 264 BC. The Greek Empire was still the dominant force but beginning its decline. This kingdom (Egypt with Judea) was threatened in a regional dispute by the powerful northern country of Syria which contested the annexation of the Judean territory. Thus began a series of conflicts between the northern kings (Syria) and the southern

kings (Greek rulers in this area of the Greek Empire). Eventually Syria dominated the area from about 204 BC until 165 BC.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem during the Syrian domination of their country, there was a struggle between the Orthodox Jews who held to traditional religious practice and the more liberal faction of that society who had been deeply influenced by decades of Greek language, religion and ideas. (The rise of the Pharisee sect began as guardians of orthodoxy). These two factions constantly fought over who would control the High Priest's office, the most powerful position in the country.

To make matters more complicated, the High Priest was appointed by the Syrian king as a sort of governor under Syrian authority. There was much lobbying by both sides to influence the Syrian king to appoint the proper candidate. During the reign of one particularly nasty pagan king, Antiochus Epiphanes, the High Priest's office was actually sold to the highest bidder. On one occasion Antiochus appointed a High Priest and sent him to Jerusalem where he was rejected by the local orthodox leaders and run out of town. Antiochus was furious and came with his army and murdered thousands, tore down the walls, forbade circumcision on pain of death, and worst of all, erected a statue of the pagan god Olympus in the temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar.

This caused a revolt among the people and a guerilla type war led by a man named Judas Mattathias (Maccabee in Greek) ensued. This took place in 165-163 BC.

After a long struggle the Syrian king was forced to sign a peace treaty, the temple was cleansed and worship was renewed (the feast of *Hanukkah* is a remembrance of the rededication of the temple). The Jews enjoyed freedom for about 100 years.

In 145 BC, Rome defeated Greece and began to tighten its grip on world power. In 63 BC it captured Jerusalem and subdued all the local kings under its control. Rome put local rulers to govern the area. At the time of Jesus' birth, Herod was one of these rulers appointed by Rome.

When we look at the rise and fall of the four great kingdoms, what I have described to you is what took place in the area of Judea between the fall and rise of the third and fourth kingdoms. Daniel's vision is a close-up view of what will take place in Israel during the period when the Greek Empire is declining and the Roman Empire is ascending.

Chapter 11 is a detailed account of the kings, wars and outcome of this period. An outline that explains this in detail verse by verse is available at:

bibletalk.tv/outline-of-kings

Note that the verse is printed on the left side and on the right side is the interpretation agreed upon by most scholars. By verse 36 of chapter 11 and into chapter 12 you begin to have three interpretations of the verses that I have noted for you. There are various reasons for this: some scholars think there is a secondary and final fulfillment of these words, so words refer to the same idea that repeats itself in the future and at the end of the world. Verse 36 can only refer to Antiochus and his deeds. It could also refer to the antichrist at the end of the world.

This list gives you the generally agreed interpretations plus at times the varied ideas of other scholars (McGuiggan, Church of Christ scholar; Butler, Evangelical scholar; Young, Concordance editor).

DANIEL 12 – THE TIME OF THE END

Daniel continues his dialogue with the angel as the action sweeps forward to the outcome of the troubles that will take place at the end of time. The previous chapters spoke of the battle between Persia, Greece and then the local battles in Palestine until the appearance and dominance by the Roman Empire. In this last chapter we fast forward to look at the outcome of the struggle between the fourth kingdom (Rome) and the kingdom that will replace all other kingdoms before it, the kingdom of God. Note that he is still talking about the four kingdoms and God's final kingdom, but again in a different way.

Features in chapter 12: Daniel uses expressions (time, times and $\frac{1}{2}$ a time) and numbers to determine the time when certain events will take place, especially the end of Jerusalem and the world. He expresses the promise that God will rescue those written in His book, the chosen ones. He predicts a time of hardship and eventual punishment. Daniel has the vision to predict events but the time is hidden or closed to him and to us. Many have tried to guess or decode.

Again, there are different interpretations depending on the way you think the prophecies concern only a future event or deal exclusively with the end of time or both. This is why you have different viewpoints but all the same sequence:

1. The rise and fall of the fourth kingdom.
2. Persecution of God's people.
3. Perseverance and victory of God's people.
4. Defeat, judgment, disappearance of the fourth kingdom.
5. Reward and happiness for God's people in the end.

And so Daniel completes his visions and his book is finished. Note the different ways to express the time element: 7 weeks, 62 weeks, 1 week; time, times, $\frac{1}{2}$ time. Same ratio, same sequence.

SUMMARY

Here are some things to remember about Daniel's book.

1. It deals with four world powers and the church.
2. It describes the rise and fall of these and the eventual establishment of the church in a variety of ways, symbols and images, but repeats the same story.
3. It is important to remember the sequence of events in chapter 2 which remains the same even though the symbolism is at times hard to understand or match exactly to precise historical dates.
4. The prophecy is concerned with events and epochs; exact numbers are used symbolically.
5. The sequence has been proven historically
6. There may still be final fulfillment at the end

6.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

We have completed a quick review of the book of Daniel and discussed the main interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the subsequent visions that Daniel had that gave more detail concerning the meaning of the dream. Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the other visions revealed that, beginning with the world power that ruled while he was alive, there would be a total of four world empires.

During the fourth and last world empire a new spiritual kingdom would be formed by God that would replace these and remain forever. In some of his visions Daniel said that at the beginning, the spiritual kingdom would be in a great struggle with the fourth and last world power, but would eventually prevail.

Daniel also prophesied about regional wars and events that would lead to the rise and final collapse of the ancient kingdom of Judah and its capital Jerusalem, as well as the time frame for when the Messiah would come.

History has shown that Daniel's visions and prophecies were accurate: There were four great world empires that succeeded each other: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

During the Roman period the Messiah was born and fulfilled His ministry, the spiritual kingdom (church) was established and the Jewish kingdom was destroyed. It was during the Roman period that the church was persecuted but eventually overcame this persecution to spread the gospel throughout the world.

Now more than 2,000 years later none of these world empires remain, but the spiritual kingdom (the church) continues to grow throughout the world, exactly as Daniel prophesied.

You could almost say that the book of *Revelation* is a continuation of the book of Daniel. In it John, the Apostle, uses the same kind of apocalyptic language filled with imagery and symbolism to focus on the struggle between the fourth world power and the spiritual kingdom that Daniel spoke of long before.

BACKGROUND

Author, date, place

The book of Revelation was written by John the Apostle. He names himself and the fact that God dictated it to Jesus who gave it to an angel who spoke to John. It was circulated among the churches in Asia Minor and gained early acceptance by the entire church.

John lived to an advanced age teaching and serving the church at Ephesus. He was banished to the island of Patmos in the Roman persecution of Domitian in the years 94-95 AD. It is at Patmos that he had the visions he describes in the book.

He was released from exile in 96 AD and returned to Ephesus where he wrote the book of *Revelation* and circulated it at first among the seven churches in that area to whom the book is addressed.

ROMAN HISTORY

John lived through three periods of Roman persecution.

1. Nero – 64-67 AD. Nero blamed Christians for setting fire to Rome (something which he did to begin a new building program). Peter and Paul were martyred during this persecution.
2. Domitian – 95-96 AD. A short but vicious persecution that took over 40,000 Christian lives and sent John to Patmos
3. Trajan – 98-117 AD. This happened after *Revelation* was written. Trajan promoted emperor worship. The last persecution experienced by John, but not the last for the church.

There were eight other major persecutions of Christians by Rome, the last being by Diocletian in 284-305 AD. When Constantine became emperor and was converted, Christianity became the state religion by the edict of Milan in 313 AD.

John writes about the struggle between Rome and the church as prophesied by Daniel. He uses the same language of symbolism but does so to hide the meaning of the book from those who were attacking the church during his lifetime.

CONTENT

Revelation is the only book in the New Testament that is completely devoted to prophecy. It is hard to understand

because it is written in a particular literary style called *apocalyptic*. (Different like Shakespearean English is different than modern English)

Apocalyptic literature had certain features:

- Usually produced in times of persecution and suffering
- Had an intense despair of present circumstances and an intense hope of divine intervention in the future
- Used symbolic language, dreams, visions
- Writers used celestial characters (e.g. demons and angel) to act out God's purpose in history
- The wicked suffered catastrophic judgment, and the righteous were saved in supernatural way
- Most apocalyptic writing used the names of Biblical historical characters as authors (e.g. Enoch)

All apocalyptic writings had these characteristics including Revelation but this book names its true author, John, and he plays a part in the action of the book.

Rome and its past and future persecutions was the model for the book because most imagery of the enemy can easily be traced to Rome and its opposition to the church. For example, the "beast" with authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation could only refer to Rome in the first century; the "mark" that all had to carry to buy or sell correlates to the imperial seal on contracts, licenses, wills and all legal documents; "Babylon", "sits on 7 hills", refers to a wicked city surrounded by seven mountains as Rome was. There are many other thinly veiled references to Rome in the book aside from these.

Regardless of how people interpret it now, the book of *Revelation* was seen as referring to the church's relationship with Rome

when it was first read in the first century. The warning and encouragement was to stand firm against a pagan and totalitarian rule that wanted to control and then destroy the religion and thus the faith of Christians. It was also a warning to Christians who were growing lax in their moral standards and wavering in their faith.

The language and symbols used came from Old Testament imagery which would be understandable to Christians, especially Jewish Christians. The message is encoded in this way because of the persecution, so that Roman authorities would not understand the content of the material that was mostly about them.

The imagery and symbols come mostly from Daniel and Ezekiel, so that an understanding of this material is necessary if the modern reader is to correctly interpret the book of *Revelation* (this is why we studied the book of *Daniel* first).

Because the book is complex, there are many interpretations as to its meaning. These have been traditionally grouped into different “schools” of thought. Briefly, these are:

A. **PRETERIST SCHOOL** – all symbolism refers to the first century only. No prophecy in the book.

B. **IDEALIST SCHOOL** – the book is non-historical, it symbolizes the ongoing struggle between Christ, His church and the evil in the world.

C. **HISTORICIST SCHOOL** – believe that the book outlines the actual history of the world from Pentecost until the second coming of Jesus. Try to interpret world events today in relationship to *Revelation*.

D. **FUTURIST SCHOOL** – believe the first 3 chapters refer to the first century and the churches that existed then. The other part of the book refers to a future event they call “the great

tribulation” and the symbols describe what will take place then. (Evangelicals and Charismatics believe a combination of C and D.)

In the churches of Christ, we hold that John uses the struggle between Rome and the church as a model for the ongoing struggle which will end when Christ returns. This is a combination of A and B.

Another group of ideas regarding *Revelation* is based on what the “1000 years” in *Revelation* refers to. There are three main “millennial” (1000) views.

A. **POST-MILLENNIAL** – 1000 years is figurative of a long period of time before Jesus returns. In this view, the gospel will finally win over all the nations, there will be a period of peace and then Jesus will return.

B. **A-MILLENNIAL** – 1000 years is only figurative but Jesus will return anytime and when He does all will end, a new heaven and earth will be created. The millennial is now, the time between the establishment of the church and the end.

C. **PRE-MILLENNIAL** – Jesus will return personally to initiate His kingdom and the saints will be raised and reign with Him on earth for 1000 years. At the end of this time Satan will rise up in rebellion and be destroyed, then the wicked will be judged and eternity begins.

OUTLINE

There are many interpretations based on the meaning of symbols and the time and situations that the codes actually refer to. The key to understanding and outlining the book, however, is to understand that the book is about the revelation of Jesus Christ, either revealing Him and His work in the history of man or

revealing His word and working out of His promises to His church.

The theme of the book is: *Jesus Christ and the things He has revealed that will happen*. The outline of the book is as follows:

1. Prologue – Christ communicates with – John 1:1-8
2. Vision I – Christ in the church on earth, 7 churches – 1:9-3:22
3. Vision II – Christ in heaven – 4:1-16:21 - John’s description of the heavenly activity on behalf of the church, 7 seals, 7 trumpets, 7 bowls.
4. Vision III – Christ in conquest – 17:1-21:8 - The enemy defeated by Christ; contemporary Rome; end time; the antichrist; death itself.
5. Christ and His church in heaven, new heaven and earth – 21:9-22:5
6. Christ and His challenge to His church now, obedience, reward, fellowship – 22:6-21

The book of *Revelation* was not given to predict history, but rather to show the cycle of struggle and faith that the church was undergoing then and would constantly face throughout history.

It was also written to ensure the reader that Christ would not abandon His church and in the end would totally save her. Each generation can relate to this constant struggle; to the ongoing support and strength provided by Christ; and every generation has the same hope and expectation that Jesus would return to destroy evil once for all and take the church to be with Him forever in heaven.

The danger is to get lost in the details and miss the central theme and message of assurance and hope.

7.

INTERPRETATIONS OF REVELATION

In the last chapter we reviewed the introductory material concerning the book of *Revelation*:

1. Written by John the Apostle
2. Used apocalyptic style to disguise meaning
3. Addressed to 7 churches in Asia Minor
4. Describes the struggle in the 1st century between Rome and the church
5. Encourages church to persevere in suffering because Rome will be defeated
6. Also describes the ongoing cycle of struggle between good and evil that will end with Christ's appearance at the end of the world
7. Material is presented in a series of visions that reveal Christ and His relationship and dealings with the church on earth, the church in heaven, as well as the destruction of Satan.

The theme of the book is the revelation of Christ and the outline follows this theme. If you do not get mired down in all of the imagery, the book is rather straightforward. In this lesson we will examine the first two sections of this outline.

PROLOGUE – CHRIST COMMUNICATES

The first verse gives insight into the time that the rest of the material is referring to.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— ⁶ and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

⁷Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. ⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.””

- Revelation 1:1-8

As I said before, there are four main views on what *Revelation* is referring to:

1. **Preterist** – The term refers to something that has happened in the past - Preterist tense of a verb (IE. *I go* - present tense; *I went*: preterite tense or past tense). The book refers to the events taking place during the writing of the book. The struggle between Rome and the church.
2. **Idealist / Philosophical / Spiritual** – The book contains principles that refer to the church's ongoing struggle with the evil in the world (cyclical) and how it will triumph.
3. **Historical / Historicist** – A forecast of the entire period of church history between the first and second coming of Jesus. Key events in history prophesied until the end (Roman Catholicism, Reformation, etc.).
4. **Futurist** – The book describes mainly the events that will take place at the end of the world. Total prophecy.

There are good arguments to support each of these views and when it comes to *Revelation* it is wise not to be too dogmatic because there are many things we do not completely grasp.

However, if I were to say what I personally believe is the best approach and the one traditionally followed by most teachers in the church of Christ, I would say that we hold a position that is a combination of the first and second views.

I believe that the book of *Revelation* is about the 1st century church and its struggle with its Roman oppressors and its symbolism and message also contains basic principles that point to an ongoing struggle between the kingdom and Satan which will end with Christ's second coming.

I believe this for several reasons:

1. The very first verse in the book says that what the book will describe are things that will **shortly** take place. It is about things that will happen soon in their lives. There are only two centuries between the writing of the book and the fall of Rome. Again in verse 3, John says that the time is **near** for these things to happen.
2. A book that contained a look into the future or only principles about good and evil would not have been very comforting to those who were suffering a very real persecution in their own lifetime.
3. The historical and futurist views do not deal with the reality of the Roman Empire (they even revive the Roman Empire in one instance). In addition to this, many of their historical applications do not fit the symbolism of the book. For example, trying to make the second beast the Catholic Church. *Revelation* teaches that both beasts existed at the same time but the Roman Catholic Church did not exist at the time of the Roman Empire, only after. These two views begin with an assumption and then try to fit all the symbols and images into their assumption. There are always pieces left over.
4. The combination of the Preterist and Idealist view explain accurately (and simply) most of the symbols, images and purposes of the book. It was written to encourage and warn the early church about events soon to take place. It provides every generation an encouragement that Christ will care for His church and be victorious in the end.

For these reasons we will study the book as a letter written by John dealing with contemporary problems of the 1st century church, offering God's solution that would continue to encourage the church until Christ's return.

So let us go back to the text in chapter 1:1-3

¹ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, ² who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. ³ Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

- Revelation 1:1-3

John establishes the fact that what is to follow is a revelation given to him by God and concerns events that will take place in the not too distant future.

⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood— ⁶ and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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

⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.””

- Revelation 1:4-8

John specifies to whom this message is addressed, the seven churches that formed a network in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). He also mentions from whom the message comes:

- The Father, who was, is, to come. The eternal One.
- The Holy Spirit, the seven spirits before the throne. The perfect Spirit (7).
- Jesus Christ, the Son, the savior, the Lord.

No doubt that this is the God they worship as He is fully revealed here in His triune nature.

In verses 7 and 8 he mentions Jesus coming in judgment (mourning). This does not refer to the second coming but rather the coming of Jesus to fulfill the things written in the book. There is a lot of confusion and debate here.

The “coming” of the Lord is a phrase that is associated with temporal judgment, not just the second coming. For example, Matthew 24:27 refers to the “coming” of the Son of Man, but in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

When God is said to be “coming” it either means to judge a nation for some reason (Sodom, Amalekites, Egypt) or the final second coming of Christ. The context will determine which. In Revelation 1:7, the coming of Jesus refers to the things that John has said will shortly take place. This means that for the early Christians, Christ was coming to rescue them from their predicament. They might have thought it would be the second coming, but we know it was not.

History shows that within a relatively short period of time the persecution stopped, Rome crumbled, and the Christian religion survived and flourished.

Historians will credit the breakdown of government, the emerging strength of surrounding nations as the reason for Rome's fall, but through the eyes of faith we see God working to destroy this enemy using other nations as His servants. In the Old Testament He used Nebuchadnezzar as His tool and even called him His "servant." We see, therefore, that the premise of the book is established in the first eight verses.

- God reveals His plan to John.
- John addresses the church with God's plan.
- Christ is preparing to come to save them from their present suffering.
- His coming and salvation will be soon.

In the next section the message concerning Christ's coming changes as John has his first vision. In this first vision Christ begins by warning the churches about their spiritual condition before He comes to visit judgment on the enemy.

VISION 1 – CHRIST AND THE CHURCH – 1:9-3:22

In these next chapters John begins describing his first vision, one in which Christ appears to him and gives him a message for the churches.

There were more than seven churches that existed in those times but these congregations formed a network of churches around the church where John worked, Ephesus. Also the number 7 was significant in referring to what is perfect, 7 churches symbolizing the entire church.

In verses 9 through 20 John has a vision of Jesus in His glorious state.

⁹ "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.""

- Revelation 1:9-11

He is given the command to write a book while he was in exile on Patmos. The book is to be addressed to seven churches and their names are given.

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands

- Revelation 1:12-13a

The lampstands are later explained as churches among which the Lord is present.

^{13b} I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. ¹⁴ His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp

two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.
- Revelation 1:13b-16

He describes the heavenly vision of Jesus: Son of Man (Old Testament title for Messiah), long robe (royal attire), golden girdle (purity/priesthood), hair white as wool (supernatural), eyes aflame (knowledge), feet like bronze (power), voice like many waters (universal), 7 stars in hand (authority), sword from mouth (word/judgment), face shining like the sun (awe inspiring). This is a vision of God with each element describing different facets of God's character and being.

¹⁷ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."
- Revelation 1:17-18

John is afraid and Jesus reassures John that it is He, the Lord.

¹⁹ Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."
- Revelation 19-20

He is told to record his vision and explained the meaning of the seven stars. The seven stars are angels who belong or serve the churches represented by the lampstands. In essence Jesus is saying that He is close at hand, close to the churches, ready to

judge and intervene in the things that are taking place, but first He has a specific message for the churches.

The next two chapters list the seven churches mentioned in 1:11 and the message for each. Each church has specific problems and needs which are addressed, but the entire message contains some basic principles which are repeated from church to church.

7 PRINCIPLES OF THE 7 LETTERS

1. Christ knows every Christian – The Lord knows in intimate detail the work (or absence thereof) of each member of every congregation. This should be a source of comfort and motivation for all.

2. Christ wants the church to guard His teachings – The church needs to be careful in what it hears, what it believes and what it teaches. The doctrines that you hold and teach **will** make a difference (Matthew 7:15-27).

3. Christ wants Christians to grow in service. The Lord mentions service 5 out of 7 times:

- Thyatira – last works greater than first.
- Philadelphia – great opportunity for service.
- Ephesus – left your first love, repent.
- Laodicea – lukewarm, will reject them.
- Sardis – not living up to your reputation. Christ cares about what we do, how we serve.

4. Christ wants Christians to live in purity – There is no compromise. This was the problem with Jezebel and the Nicolaitians. Our standards are not to be set by the world around us.

5. Christ wants Christians to be ready for persecution and persevere in it – the Roman persecution had been ongoing and would continue for some time. The Roman persecution embodied the spirit of all those who would oppose Christ until the end of time.

6. Christ wants Christians to know that it is possible to be lost (and He wants all to be saved).

- Ephesus – remove their candlestick
- Laodicia – spew out of mouth

You cannot serve God and Mammon; if you serve the world you lose your salvation, if you refuse to serve Christ you lose your salvation.

7. Christ will reward Christians who overcome – The final word to each of the 7 churches is that if they **overcome** (the temptation to deny Christ or return to the world and give up due to suffering on account of their faith), they will be **richly** rewarded. Some of the rewards mentioned:

1. Eat of the tree of life.
2. Not hurt by second death.
3. New name on white stone.
4. Receive Morning Star.
5. White garments, name in book of life.
6. Pillar in New Jerusalem.
7. Sit and reign with Christ in heaven.

All of these are symbolic ways of saying that those who remain faithful will resurrect from the dead, have eternal life with God in heaven and reign with Him in power over all the spirit world.

This is the encouragement to the churches in the area of Asia Minor but who represented the entire church and by extension the same message for the church today wherever it meets.

8.

JOHN'S VISIONS

So far we have been able to put *Revelation* into context despite its symbolism and style: written by John the Apostle to early churches with the goal of encouraging them to persevere under Roman persecution, provide ongoing encouragement to every generation concerning the ever present power of evil and Christ's ultimate victory.

We began with John's vision of Jesus and His warning to the church to prepare for struggle and to persevere in suffering if they wanted the prize of eternal life.

In his first vision John sees Jesus addressing the church in its predicament here on earth (letters to the seven churches).

The next vision, which is the longest, is the vision that John has of Christ as He takes His position in heaven. So far we have only seen Jesus in human form, in humiliation and death with a brief moment of glory at the resurrection. Now John will describe the glorious Jesus in the heavenly realm where He reigns.

VISION 2 – CHRIST IN HEAVEN – 4:1-11:19

1. CHAPTER 4:1-2

¹ After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” ² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.

- Revelation 4:1-2

With chapter 4 begins a vision of heaven and a revelation of what will shortly take place on earth. I said that one device often used in apocalyptic literature was action played out in the celestial realm. True to form, John’s vision is one that sees the characters and symbols in a heavenly scene, however, the action taking place there will describe the things that are soon to happen on earth.

Chapter 4 establishes the scene of the vision which is heaven and God’s throne. It does so to confirm that what will happen and what will be said are of divine origin, not human.

The idea of God’s throne is the central idea or image of the book and suggests power and sovereignty:

- The jewels mentioned refer to beauty and value.
- 24 elders mentioned represent majesty and authority. Elders may be angels who are the spiritual counterparts to the 12 patriarchs and 12 apostles, leaders of a heavenly chorus of praise.

- Golden crowns are emblem of dignity and honor.
- Thunder and lightning represent signs of a sudden display of God’s power and authority in spiritual or supernatural ways.
- The crystal sea is the heavenly counterpart for the Red Sea. It represents anticipated actions of God’s salvation. Salvation for the Jews first was at Red Sea with Moses. Remember that what is on earth in the story of the Jews as well as Christ and the church is a shadow or an image of what exists in heaven. We are seeing, in a symbolic way, the real things which are reflected here on earth.
- The four living creatures with many eyes and wings are not meant to be grotesque or a “horror” movie with beasts and creatures. These symbolize real things:
 - OX = service
 - LION = strength
 - MAN = intelligence
 - EAGLE = swiftness
 - These characters are the attendants of the heavenly worship.

The scene is set, and with chapter 5 the action begins that will tell a story. This story will be, in essence, the prophecy of the things that will happen to the church in its struggle with Rome and its ongoing struggle with the principle of evil embodied by Rome in the future until Jesus returns. This evil will be embodied by other things until the time when in its final manifestation (antichrist) it will be destroyed for all time.

2. CHAPTER 5:1-14

¹ I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. ² And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. ⁴ Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; ⁵ and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

⁶ And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. ⁸ When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

¹⁰ "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”

¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.
- Revelation 5:1-14

The storyline is that there is a sealed book that no one was found who was worthy or able to open and read. Then a lamb appears to whom all characters give homage and He is found to be worthy of opening the book. Of course, the lamb is Christ. Here are some of the symbols:

- Scroll – a message, written front and back suggests a full message.
- 7 seals – very secure. Future message (because it is sealed).
- Lion/lamb – both sides of suffering servant and victorious messiah fused into one image.

- 7 horns/eyes – horns are for strength. Eyes represent spiritual nature. 7 spirits is Holy Spirit. One who is part of the Godhead.
- Harp – symbol for praise.
- Bowls of incense – prayers of the saints (Psalms 141:2).

The Lord Jesus, in heaven being worshipped there in authority and praise, will Himself reveal the things about to take place.

3. CHAPTER 6:1-17

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

³ When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come." ⁴ And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

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

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

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

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

Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?
- Revelation 6:1-17

The action starts as the lamb begins to break the seals which each in turn reveal various characters and events to take place. We see with the beginning of this chapter a combination of things presented like a parade in review. Some countries have military parades showing their weapons and manpower. This scene is like that, except here God begins to display the power at His disposal in order to bring judgment on the enemy.

Each horse is paraded to show a facet of God's power not yet unleashed – it is a preview, a show of strength.

In verses 9 to 11 there is the image of the martyrs who had been persecuted. This is done to remind the reader of reason why God is preparing this show of force to bring about judgment: here is a demonstration of my power and judgment and this is the reason why it will be used!

The reference to natural disasters also is a reference to His power to use nature for His own purposes and that man is helpless.

Remember I said that the style of apocalyptic literature was always very dramatic. The rescue of the good and punishment of the evil is always very dramatic and emotional. This is not to say that God's judgment is not sure, but Rome did not fall in one crushing or climactic moment as described here. It fell gradually over a period of decades with a dynamic collapse at the end. Apocalyptic literature compresses the time and makes things happen in a much more rapid and spectacular fashion, much like movies tell in only two hours a story that takes place over a number of years.

SYMBOLS:

- While horse, bow, crown – victory, authority
- Red horse – persecution
- Great sword – butchering, killing
- Black horse – forerunner of death
- Scale with wheat – economic choices, necessities, oil, etc.
- Pale horse – death and hell
- Souls – life
- White robe – purity
- Heavenly signs, natural phenomena – judgment of nations (i.e. moon and blood, Joel, Acts – beginning of end of Jerusalem)

The lamb is revealing God's power and the reason why He is about to bring judgment.

4. CHAPTER 7

In the previous chapter the lamb has been opening the seals, six so far, and all show the awesome power that God has and will unleash on His enemy and the enemy of His people.

In chapter 7 there is a break in the action as he reassures the faithful that His judgment will not indiscriminately fall on them as well. To destroy Rome with all the fire power described would make one think that they would also be taken out by “friendly fire,” that God is judging them too. God assures the church that He is able to judge and destroy Rome without destroying the Christians who live in the Empire. He is able to do this for two reasons:

1. Verse 3, the saints are sealed (protected, identified) by God Himself.

2. Verse 14, the saints are part of God's kingdom and the kingdom is indestructible.

Here they are described in their already glorified state in heaven, but the ones described as having white robes, singing around God's throne are the saints, the church, Christians.

SYMBOLS:

- Seal – shows ownership, protection against tampering, also denotes genuineness.
- 144,000 – Refers to the church or Christians.
 - The number 12 is the symbol of God working in the world or organized religion [3 (God) x 4 (world)]
 - $12 \times 12 =$ the total of all possibility.
 - $1000 = 10$ (completeness) x $10 \times 10 =$ most mature and complete.
 - $144 \times 1000 =$ the most complete number without exception.
 - Palm branches – symbol of victory.

God reassures the saints that despite the great tribulation or judgment to come, He will watch over them because they are sealed and counted by Himself (He will not lose one).

144,000 = perfect and counted by God.

This does not mean that they will not be persecuted or affected by the things that will happen to Rome, but rather that no matter what happens they are safe with God and will be part of that heavenly group.

5. CHAPTERS 8 – 11

These chapters will describe the opening of the seventh seal. The first six demonstrated God's power to judge and destroy. When the lamb opens this one there is silence in heaven, then this opened seal reveals seven trumpets. Like the horses, the trumpets announce more power at God's disposal to destroy His enemy. The horses were paraded by and the trumpets sounded to announce.

The first four describe natural calamities that God will use as instruments of His punishment (hail, fire, storms, etc.). Trumpets five and six describe the internal and external decadence that God will permit which will lead to the weakening and eventual destruction of the Roman Empire (chapter 8:13-9:21).

Then in the middle of this description there is another interlude where God's judgment is pronounced and then three other elements are introduced:

THE LITTLE BOOK

⁸ Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." ⁹ So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." ¹⁰ I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. ¹¹ And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

- Revelation 10:8-11

The prophecy that John has to make concerning *Revelation* is that it is good to see the future but bitter to have to tell the church of the suffering to come.

MEASUREMENT OF THE TEMPLE

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

-Revelation 11:1-2

This is another way of saying the church will be protected. Before he referred to 144,000 sealed; now the same promise is made but in terms of a temple strictly measured and protected.

TWO WITNESSES

³ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

- Revelation 11:3-4

This symbolizes the gospel. The two witnesses preach successfully, are killed and then resurrect and go to heaven. Moses, Elijah (Old Testament), Peter (Jews), Paul (Gentiles) (New Testament). This all takes place in 1260 days which is 3½ years. Now 3½ years refers to a short period of time (½ of seven, ½ of a week).

The episode of the two witnesses is a symbol for the story of the church from its foundation until the destruction of Rome. It begins preaching powerfully, is persecuted and martyred, finally resurrects to victory as Rome falls, all in about 3 centuries.

After this interlude describing the little book, temple and two witnesses, the seventh trumpet is sounded and reveals great rejoicing at the victory of the saints. God judges the people. The Ark is placed in heaven. There is a final scene of victory and rejoicing.

SYMBOLS (CHAPTER 9)

- Key – authority
- Locusts – effects of immorality
- Abaddon and Apollyon – Satan
- Euphrates – furthest border of Rome
- Hoards of troops – barbarians invading Rome
- Rainbow – mercy
- Measuring rod – way to know the truth

SUMMARY

In dramatic fashion we see Christ reveal the future destruction of Rome and the preservation of the saints through this. The book does this by:

- First revealing the many aspects of God's power in controlling natural and supernatural forces to use in destroying Rome.

- It also reveals the continued suffering of the saints but provides a promise that despite this, God has numbered and will bring to heaven every single one of them.
- Through several devices it gives a scenario of how it will happen: the church beginning strong, being almost or seemingly destroyed and then overcoming a fallen Roman enemy.

In the following chapters we will see how this struggle is described once again, but this time using different symbols (like Daniel using different symbols to describe the same four kingdoms).

9.

THE MAIN STORY

PART 1

Revelation is the vision that John the Apostle has concerning the church's struggle with Rome in the 1st century. The theme of the book is the revelation of Christ, a more perfect vision of the Lord in His glorified state.

So far we have:

1. Seen the glorious vision of Christ as He speaks to John, 1:1-8.
2. Heard Christ's instructions to the church to be faithful and to persevere in suffering (Vision 1 – 1:9-3:22).
3. Watched as John describes the throne of God and the scene as Christ begins to display the power at His command that will be used to destroy the enemy, Rome.
4. We have also heard the prophecy as to the events that will take place that will lead to the church's victory. The church will grow quickly, it will be persecuted and seemingly crushed, it will survive, and the enemy will eventually fall.

All of this information, these images and these symbols have been presented in the second vision, chapters 4-11.

Now we begin studying the third vision as John describes the actual struggle itself. First he introduces Christ, then there is the viewing of His power, now a play by play of the actual struggle.

Remember, when John is writing, the persecution by Rome has begun and what he is writing about informs the church of the 1st century concerning their immediate and future struggle; in this way it was prophecy. We read it today and see that the prophecy was fulfilled: Rome did fall, the church did survive, however the book prophesizes that the cycle of evil and struggle will continue and one day Jesus will return to put an end to this and open the new heavens and earth for the faithful.

In this sense it is prophecy to us. Our encouragement is that if the former prophecy about Rome was eventually fulfilled, we should prepare ourselves for the prophecy of the second coming to be fulfilled as well.

VISION 3 – CHRIST IN CONQUEST – 12:1-21:8

The bulk of this vision is the actual description of the struggle between Satan and his earthly embodiment, Rome, and the Lord Jesus and His earthly embodiment, the church. John will describe the war between these two, jumping from images of Satan and Rome to images of Jesus and the church. He will also describe the tactics each will use to destroy the other.

¹ A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ² She was pregnant

and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.
- Revelation 12:1-2

Here we have the introduction of the woman, she is the ideal of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. She gives birth to a child who is Christ, the product of God's people in the Old and New Testaments brought about by a long and painful history.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.
- Revelation 12:3

The red dragon is Satan.

- 7 heads – world domination
- 10 horns – complete destructive power
- 7 crowns – not victory but symbolizes rule

⁴ Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶ The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.
- Revelation 12:4-6

Sweeping stars is the killing of God's people, including the attempt to destroy the Christ child. This child is prepared to rule with all power. The wilderness is the earth (not heaven) and 1260 days we know represents a short time.

In verses 7 to 17, John describes the scene in which we see Satan's four-step attack to destroy Jesus and the church.

1. He tries to attack the child.

These are attempts to keep Him from being born or surviving once He is born. This goes back to the temptation in the garden and the murder of Abel.

2. He tries to attack the throne in heaven.

He begins a spiritual war in an effort to keep Christ from bringing His blood to the throne so he can continue to accuse man of sin. However, the lamb does come to the throne. The gospel is being spread thus taking away his power and having him thrown down.

3. He attacks the woman.

The woman is given wings, a symbol of protection. Satan sends rivers of wickedness, but the earth drinks it up. Lies, wickedness, false religion are sent to target the church but she resists these, she remains faithful; but the world, non believers, they drink in these things to their own destruction.

The woman, symbolically, gives birth to Christians and is afforded protection. The woman is spiritual Israel, God's people throughout history. An attack against God's people to stop them from multiplying (through Roman persecution) fails and the wickedness sent falls upon the wicked.

4. He attacks individuals within the church.

In this he is successful because individuals have free choice. Some are destroyed. Some Christians fall away, lose faith, etc.

The description of the struggle continues as agents are brought in to help defeat the seed or the offspring of the woman. Here John's vision gets more specific as to the description of the embodiment of Satan, namely the Roman Empire. In chapter 13, he begins, symbolically, to describe the enemy: Rome (embodiment of Satan).

In verses 1 - 10, he describes the first beast, an ally of Satan in the war against the church. The first beast is red, has 10 horns, 7 heads and 10 crowns. This looks something like Satan described in the previous chapter, but here it is the embodiment of Satan.

This beast represents Rome:

- Red is evil and violence.
- 10 horns are absolute temporal power.
- 10 crowns are absolute temporal ruler ship.
- 7 heads could be the 7 mountains around Rome.
- 7 heads also refer to 7 kings or 7 emperors of Rome.
- One head wounded and come back to life - "Nero's resurrection."

There were actually eight emperors from Augustus in 14 AD to Domitian in 96 AD when this book was probably written. However, one is like a resurrection of a previous one: There was a rumor in Rome that Nero would resurrect and come back. When future persecutions began after Nero's death it was said that it was Nero's spirit dwelling and guiding the present emperor in it.

Thus seven real emperors, one in the spirit of a past one.

Now the dragon gives ruler ship over to this first beast who has existing power at the writing of the book. This beast resembles a composite of the four beasts in Daniel and John shows it to be a

terrible beast, like Daniel's fourth beast. This beast will blaspheme God and receive worship as God (emperor worship was promoted by law).

This beast will do damage for a while (3½ years). It has authority to do so (God will permit). The point is that there is no use resisting or losing hope, it will do its damage, but only for a short while.

In verses 11 – 18, a second character or agent of Satan is now called forth, the false prophet. The purpose of the false prophet is to influence the people to give worship to the first beast.

DESCRIPTION

- Horns like a lamb, speaks like a dragon (lamb/religion, dragon/evil=false religion).
- Tries to influence worship of the beast.
- Uses three methods:
 - Magic and sorcery
 - Economic sanctions. Mark of the beast. Those who worshipped received I.D. that allowed them to trade, etc.
 - Threats of violence. Those who refused were put to death.
- The false prophet recognized by his number 666. The number 6 represented incompleteness to the Jews. 666 was total imperfection, incompleteness.
- Also, the Jews had a way of equating numbers to the alphabet and the number 666 is the numerical equivalent to the word *Nero Caesar*. John used this riddle for his Jewish and Greek Christian audience.

The false prophet also corresponds historically to the *ASIARCHS*, who were priests of the cult of emperor worship and who promoted this practice throughout the provinces using occult and magic.

So far in his vision John has described:

1. Christ's power in defeating the enemy.
2. The battle itself and the enemy.
 - The child is born, attacked by Satan and taken to heaven.
 - The blood of Christ is operational and the persecution of the church begins. Will last 3½ years (short time).
 - Satan is cast out of heaven and begins to use two beasts to persecute the seed (offspring or Christians).
 - There will be a period of intense persecution.

In the next chapter John will describe the defeat and judgment of the beasts and Satan.

Chapter 14 is the announcement of the final judgment. It is divided into 3 sections: the 144,000, the three angels and the two sickles.

We have seen the action of Satan's attack and his forces. Now the judgment on him and these will be pronounced; in other words, God's counter-attack.

¹ Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder.

The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. ³ And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴ These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. ⁵ No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

- Revelation 14:1-5

We have already discussed the 144,000 and their significance. This is the perfect number of those with whom God deals with. The ones he has sealed, protected, counted and measured are shown to have survived the persecution and attacks of Satan. This is true for the 1st century as well as every subsequent attack and persecution including death itself. Those who are God's in Christ **will** be saved. The saved are the 144,000.

In verses 6 to 13, the three angels appear:

1. The first angel brings the gospel and signifies judgment is at hand.
2. The second angel announces the fall of Babylon which is code word for Rome. Babylon was the center for wickedness and idolatry as a world power which Rome now exemplifies.
3. The third angel announces the destruction of those who partake of the beast: Rome and its followers. Drinking the wine of wrath is judgment, the outcome of following evil. Contrast between those who receive the mark of the beast (who accept and embrace Rome), these are tormented and have no rest; and the 144,000 who are with God.

In verses 14 to 20, the image of the two sickles. This is the image of judgment after the destruction of the beast and its followers.

1. Jesus judges first and His judgment is to reap the harvest of His followers who will be with Him (the 144,000).
2. Then the angel of judgment comes and gathers those who are unbelievers and sinners and their judgment will be suffering.

So the beast is destroyed, the followers are punished, the earth is judged with good rewarded and evil rejected and punished.

SUMMARY

John describes the battle between Satan, his forces, and Jesus and His church.

In chapter 14 the final destruction and judgment are described. In the following chapters John will digress and give more details concerning the destruction of Rome and the final dealing that God will have with Satan himself. He will also describe the things that the 144,000 can look forward to.

10.

THE MAIN STORY

PART 2

The book of *Revelation* has 22 chapters, but by the end of chapter 14 we have seen the major part of the action in the story that it is telling. Through a series of visions, God reveals to John through Jesus what will be the outcome of the struggle between Rome and the church. In his visions, John sees:

1. Jesus speaking to the churches.
2. God displaying His various powers to defeat the enemy.
3. The way that the struggle will take place (a preview): the church begins quickly, Satan crushes it temporarily, the church survives and grows, Satan and his servants are defeated.
4. Satan's attacks against the Messiah, the throne of grace and God's people.
5. Satan's allies, the beast (Rome), the false prophet (emperor worship).
6. God's final judgment of both the faithful and the unfaithful.

In the following verses John provides more detail about God's dealings with Satan and the 144,000.

THE CONFLICT CONTINUES

– CHAPTERS 15-16

In chapter 15, after announcing the ultimate victory in the future for Christians and the church, John goes back to describing God's attack on Satan himself. The final set of woes that will be unleashed on Rome is revealed, as well as a vision of the victorious martyrs in heaven.

CHAPTER 15:1-8

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

- Revelation 15:1

John sees more of God's power being paraded. The final destructive power God will use.

² And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God ³ and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, King of the nations

⁴ Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come
and worship before you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

- Revelation 15:2-4

The sea of glass and fire is a cosmic reference to evil, the place where the dragon dwells, a place where the saints must cross in order to reach their heavenly reward. The saints have survived the evil (sea of glass and fire) and have made it to the other side and are now singing praises to God in heaven.

The book of *Revelation* is about Christ, but it is also about Christ and His people: the seven churches, the 144,000, the temple measured, the woman, the children of the seed, the ones clothed in white and the multitude. All of these refer to Christians, and the book constantly speaks of their plight, salvation and future, as well as the impending doom of Satan and his servants (Rome).

⁵ After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it was opened. ⁶ Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.

⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. ⁸ And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

- Revelation 15:5-8

Now that he is finished describing the victory of the saints and their place in heaven, he goes back to describing how God will destroy the enemy.

SYMBOLS:

- Sea of glass – cosmic symbol of evil.
- Temple of tabernacle – the holy of holies of heaven; the source of the judgment and power.
- 7 angels, plagues, bowls – the complete (7) destruction of the enemy and the impenitent.
- Dress of angels – similar to priests in Old Testament, servants of God on behalf of the people.
- 7 golden bowls – golden vessels indicate service to God (I.e. implements in temple made of gold).
- Forever – how long His wrath will be on the wicked.
- Smoke in the temple – God's presence.
- None able to enter – God's judgment is set, no changing, no more opportunity for mediation.

CHAPTER 16:1-21

The judgment was announced before (6:13-17 – 6th seal) and paraded (7 trumpets), but now the vision shows the final judgment to be carried out and what will be the results when it finally happens.

The trumpets were a kind of warning for men to repent, this is why only 1/3 of the earth is destroyed. Without repentance the bowls will be emptied and this time all will be destroyed. No more warnings, the judgment has come.

The appearance of Christianity, the preaching of the gospel and the reaction of Christians under persecution in the Empire – all of these combined with the natural problems Rome was suffering provided a witness and encouragement for them to turn to God.

History shows that they did not. Constantine, the first Roman Emperor, was converted in 312 AD on the eve of battle and he established toleration of Christianity throughout the Empire but this was too little and too late to avoid its judgment and final fall in 410 AD. It continued as a political force but was soon displaced by other nations as a world power and ultimately became the center for the Roman Catholic Church in the 7th century and the Italian Renaissance in the 15th century.

When John is speaking, however, Rome dominates the world and is officially seeking to destroy the church, and for this God announces that it will be defeated and destroyed. Complete destruction does not mean every building burned to the ground, but rather it will lose its dominance, be defeated, never to regain its status. Today it is only the 3rd largest economy in Europe, behind Germany and France.

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

- Revelation 16:1

The voice from the temple is God's voice, He is the only one in the temple. God is pronouncing judgment.

The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

- Revelation 16:2

First bowl, land destruction, punishment of the wicked specifically (no overlap to Christians).

The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.

- Revelation 16:3

Second bowl, maritime destruction.

⁴ The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

“You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were;

⁶ for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.

⁷ And I heard the altar respond:

Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.

- Revelation 16:4-7

Third bowl, land and water destruction. The image is that the enemy has made the martyrs drink the cup of wrath and now the enemy will drink destruction as well. All of this as a response to the prayers of the saints.

⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹ They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

- Revelation 16:8-9

Fourth bowl represents the destruction of the normal functioning of the heavenly bodies. Note that these first four

bowls parallel the first four trumpets, but now they are intensified. Also, not even the bowls of wrath could motivate these evil men to repent: a justification of God's judgment.

¹⁰ The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

- Revelation 16:10-11

Fifth bowl, complete collapse due to internal decay and evil. The throne of the beast which is his power source, is affected. This does not turn them toward God but rather intensifies his blasphemy and evil deeds.

¹² The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. ¹³ Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴ They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

¹⁵ "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed."

¹⁶ Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

- Revelation 16:12-16

Sixth bowl, complete destruction by invading armies. Euphrates is the land of the enemies of the Empire. The river dried up

suggests that there is nothing between the enemies of Rome and the seat of power, not even the most northern natural barrier, the Euphrates River. The way is clear for the enemies to enter the land.

Historically, the Parthians, who were from the region of Iran, ultimately invaded Rome.

At this point John takes another break and explains how Satan and Rome are not going to go down without a fight. John tells us what they do. Out of their mouths come three unclean spirits (frogs). Since there is an army under God's direction coming to battle with them, Satan and the beast will also marshal forces to meet them. The unclean spirits are possibly evil propaganda and alliances that Rome will form in order to defend itself (which it did), many of whom turned against her in the end. They complete their deceptions in organizing a defensive force and are ready for battle as they gather at a place called HAR-MAGEDON. We do not see the battle yet, but we will get the results of the battle in chapter 19.

Historically we know that as the Empire grew weak, it became vulnerable to outside attack which occurred as the Goths, Visigoths and Barbarians began to overrun the city in the 3rd and 4th centuries. This is the vision of this final defeat.

HAR-MAGEDDON or ARMAGEDDON. Literally, Mount of Megiddo was a city of the Manassites in the great plain of the tribe of Issachar, about 75 miles northwest of Jerusalem. In the Old Testament this place was a strategic military fortress for Solomon. A place where many great battles were won and lost: Gideon, Deborah, Saul and Jonathan as well as Ahaziah and Josiah.

In the Hebrew mind it was a place of significant military history. Today we would see it like "met my Waterloo", "remember the

Alamo”, “Gettysburg”. It was a symbol of struggle, defeat, and battles of epic proportions.

The point is that Satan is not going down without a fight. He will gather his forces and wage an all-out war in resistance to God’s judgment. It will be like the Alamo, Iwo Jima, Dunkirk, Battle of Britain, Berlin wall, Orange revolution, etc.

Har-Mageddon, or Megiddo, or Armageddon is a place that symbolizes struggle in resistance against God’s judgment.

The chapter begins with God’s final judgment being carried out as the bowls of wrath are being poured out. This scene is interrupted as Satan and the beast respond by gathering its forces for battle and resistance against this judgment. When the trumpets were sounded in chapter 9, the sixth trumpet announced a series of wars and battles. But now under the 6th bowl it is the war, the final battle (the mother of all battles).

From a secondary prophecy perspective, this would refer to Rome’s final defeat where she would no longer rise to prominence or world power. From an ongoing prophecy perspective it refers to any ungodly nation or entity that resists God’s call or judgment. The final result: defeat (I.e. Napoleon, Hitler, USSR, even US if it abandons God). From the final prophecy perspective it is when Jesus will return to give the final blow to death.

Now that he has explained Satan’s reaction to God’s final judgment represented by the bowls, John will describe the final bowl.

Verses 17 to 21 – Seventh bowl. Final judgment on Rome, despite its resistance, symbolized by Har-Mageddon.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!

- Revelation 16:17

The same voice that announced the judgment announces its completion. The bowl is poured out in the "air." Satan is the ruler of the powers and principalities of the air (Ephesians 2:3). The judgment is on Satan himself.

Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.

- Revelation 16:18

The natural disasters always refer to the passing of a nation. The greater the disaster, the greater the nation. The greatest earthquake ever parallels the passing of the greatest human empire ever, Rome.

¹⁹ The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.

- Revelation 16:19-20

John reveals that the beast is a city and the city's symbolic name is Babylon. In the next chapter he will give more details as to who this Babylon really is.

That it is split into three demonstrates its utter destruction; the nations and islands are its allies who are destroyed. This is no

coincidence, all these military and natural calamities are the way God is judging (drinking the cup) Rome and her servants.

From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

- Revelation 16:21

Hailstones show that it was not just a destruction of the government or leadership, but the entire nation suffered defeat and punishment in the judgment. Again as justification of God's acts, the people curse God despite their judgment. They are defeated, destroyed, but not annihilated. The culture survives but not as believers. Israel, when punished, repented and returned to God, but not these people.

In the next chapter, John will be describing in more detail the beast (Roman Empire) but using the imagery of a harlot to describe the symbol or the heart of the Empire which was the city of Rome itself.

11.

THE MAIN STORY

PART 3

In studying the book of *Revelation* we must not lose sight of the fundamental story: the rise of the church, the attempt by Satan in the person of the Roman Empire to destroy her, the survival of the church and the eventual judgment and destruction of Rome and Satan as well as the exaltation of the church to heaven. The symbols get confusing but this is the basic story that they tell.

So far in this story this is what has taken place:

1. Christ and His church have been introduced.
2. Both God's power and Satan's power have been described. Seven trumpets reveal God's warning and power. Satan and his allies have been described (dragon, beast, false prophet).
3. Satan's attack has been made.
4. God's response to this attack has been described (bowls of wrath).

In the previous chapter I described the bowls of wrath that represent God's judgment (the extent and power of it) on Satan and his followers.

The sixth bowl spoke of military invasion and it is here that John says that Satan will marshal his forces to fight against defeat; this great battle is referred to as Har-Mageddon (a Jewish image that means “the mother of all battles”).

In chapter 16, the 7th and final bowl was described and it referred to the judgment on Rome (the city itself, the center of earthly power and the heart of Satan’s earthly servant).

As we go into the final chapters, we will see John finish the book with visions of Satan’s judgment and punishment and the exaltation of the church into heaven.

JUDGMENT ON ROME – CHAPTER 17

There is a pause as we receive more information about Rome and the reason for her judgment and punishment which was announced as the 7th bowl in the previous chapter.

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

- Revelation 17:1-2

THE GREAT HARLOT IS ROME.

The term, “Sits on many waters,” refers to the nations. An empire that sits over many nations. Adultery is idolatry, and adultery with kings is Rome’s sin of leading other nations into idolatry and worldliness. She is a leader in this.

³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, ⁵ and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." ⁶ And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly
- Revelation 17:3-6

DESCRIPTION OF THE HARLOT, THE WOMAN (THE CITY OF ROME)

The description, "She sits on the beast," means that she derives her power from the beast (Roman Empire) described in chapter 13. "Dressed as a queen," not beautiful but the picture is one of excess luxury, haughty splendor. The cup represents her sins of immorality, blasphemy and the blood of the saints. Her name is Babylon the Great.

The Jews understood that Babylon stood for worldly greatness wrapped in immorality, idolatry and pride. It was the standard for earthly wickedness. The only thing, power, or entity that could represent this in their time was the city of Rome.

In the prophecy mode this woman represents Rome; in the ongoing prophecy cycle this woman represents any power center with these attributes.

And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

- Revelation 17:7

This passage can be very confusing unless you understand that the angel is describing the relationship between the beast (Roman Empire) upon which the harlot (city of Rome) sits and its relationship with its allies. The angel also gives a more detailed description of the beast itself.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.

- Revelation 17:8

It is described as one who was, is not and about to come out of the abyss and destroy. He is describing the beast in relationship to its persecution of Christians. The persecution began under Nero in 68 AD but it stopped after his death (Nero was). Then it was quiet under Vespasian and Titus (Nero and persecution is not). Then under Domitian (whom many thought was Nero reincarnated) the persecution began again (Nero about to come from the abyss to persecute, destroy).

This person's name is not written in the Book of Life, he is Satan's tool. John personifies the Empire as one person: Nero.

⁹ Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,¹⁰ and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other

has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. ¹¹The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is *one* of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

- Revelation 17:9-11

John describes this beast by describing the relationship of the beasts Satan has used in the past. In the past Satan has used many beasts to persecute God's people:

- He says that the mountains are mountains or kings.
- The Roman Empire is the latest manifestation of the beast who has existed throughout history.
- The kings represent kingdoms who have acted as the beast in the past, in opposing God and persecuting God's people:
 - 5 are fallen
 - Egypt
 - Assyria
 - Babylon
 - Persia
 - Greece
 - 1 is to come: Rome
- All others are in the future
- The 8th one is the persecution used by all of these world powers. It was, then it was not, eventually will be destroyed because the one who is wielding it will be destroyed.

¹²The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority

as kings with the beast for one hour. ¹³ These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.

¹⁴ These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.” ¹⁵ And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

¹⁶ And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. ¹⁷ For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. ¹⁸ The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.

- Revelation 17:12-18

The ten horns of the beast, which are ten kings, refer to the alliances that Rome had made with Barbarian kingdoms after conquering them. They help Rome in the persecution of the church. Ultimately these turn on the harlot, Rome, and were in part responsible for its destruction.

Historically Rome relied on these nations but forbade their rulers to enjoy the Roman orgies or celebrations because they were not citizens. This caused resentment.

John describes the harlot (Rome) and the beast that gives her power (the Empire). He also explains that this beast has existed in many forms before and used the same tactic (persecution) and will do so again.

His encouragement, however, is that this present beast and its harlot will be destroyed and along with that destruction, the persecution will stop.

THE FALL OF THE HARLOT – CHAPTER 18

We have had the announcement that the city and the Harlot will fall. Now we see how great this fall really is.

VS. 1-8 – ANNOUNCEMENT OF DESTRUCTION

A dirge or lament of doom. Two voices announce this:

1. The first voice declares the reason for her fall: spiritual fornication. She has seduced others into idolatry and wickedness.
2. The second voice calls God's people to not be entangled in her sins and names another sin, that of pride. The age-old sin of pride beginning with Satan himself and every ruler that God has destroyed because of this.

VS. 9-19 – EFFECT ON THE WICKED: MOURNING

The mourning by other nations for two reasons:

1. If the great city can fall, it means that the allies do not stand a chance either.
2. Rome, as center of world trade, will cause an economic disaster when she falls. The business people, traders, bankers, etc. mourn because of the economic depression that will take place because of the fall. (Same idea if US defaults on debt or has great economic depression, it affects the entire world).

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.

- Revelation 18:20

John describes the opposite reaction of those who have been persecuted by Rome: rejoicing.

²¹ Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. ²² And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; ²³ and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer;

- Revelation 18:21-23a

The nature of the fall will be great and quick. No music (no rejoicing); no crafts (no industry or commerce); mill stopped (no food); no light (no knowledge); no marriage (no love).

In relation to its rise and stay of power (400-500 years), the destruction and loss of power was great and happened in a relatively short amount of time.

^{23b} ...and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. ²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.

- Revelation 18:23b-24

Many reasons for Rome's fall have already been mentioned, but two main ones are summarized here: promoting idolatry (sorcery) among the nations and persecution of the church.

Paul the Apostle was guilty of rejecting Christ and persecuting the church but he repented and was forgiven. Rome became more stubborn in this and was eventually destroyed.

THE WEDDING FEAST AND FALL OF THE TWO BEASTS – CHAPTER 19

The power of God and His judgment on the beast and the harlot have been pronounced. Time wise it is understood that when God pronounces something (blessing or judgment), the thing itself, even if it has not happened, is considered as done. If God says it, even if it is only in 200 years, it is as if it has already happened. His word is sure. For this reason once the judgment on the enemy has been spoken, the next scene is one of rejoicing.

In verses 1 to 10 they rejoice over the judgment of the harlot. They do so because God has heard and responded to their prayers concerning the martyred saints, and it will be an eternal judgment. All in heaven are rejoicing, the angels, the four living creatures and the saints. The rejoicing is compared to a Jewish wedding feast. It had 3 parts: *the betrothal*, the husband pays for dowry; *the interval*, the partners prepare but are separated (all Christians are in this state, waiting for the groom to come); *the feast*, the celebration that represents the consummation (the groom comes for the bride). They are rejoicing because the time of celebration is at hand. The bride and groom will be united.

John falls before the angel, but the angel directs his worship to the true object of all worship, Jesus Christ.

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

¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God,¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.

- Revelation 19:11-18

Once again Jesus is revealed in His glorious state as the one who will win the victory over the enemy and as the one who will execute victory. Here is the One along with His army, who will face Satan and his allies at Har-Mageddon. There is no description of a battle, the simple appearance of Christ announces victory, Satan never had a chance. (In the gospels, Jesus would only have to speak and the demons were defeated.)

John mixes all of the climactic events together: the image of the celebration or victory gathering with Christ and His followers is

flashed against the scene of battle where Satan and his forces are defeated by Christ and the saints. Like a movie where a scene shows a victory celebration but flashback scenes show the battle that brought them there.

THE FALL OF THE TWO BEASTS

¹⁹ And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

²⁰ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. ²¹ And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.
- Revelation 19:19-21

John describes the defeat of the church's enemies one at a time: the harlot (Rome), the beast (Empire) and the false prophet. He describes their defeat in very short terms. The lake of fire and brimstone are hell, the place of eternal punishment. The followers were killed with the sword, the Empire itself. Now that the allies are gone, only one is left to deal with, Satan himself.

12.

THE MAIN STORY

PART 4

If someone asks you, “What is the book of *Revelation* about?” Your answer will be, “It is about the struggle between the Roman Empire and the early church in the 1st and 2nd century.”

They will ask, “What are all the symbols about?” and you will answer, “The book is written in an apocalyptic style so that the Jews could understand but the Romans could not.”

They may ask, “What does the story mean?” And you will say, “The story is a series of visions by John where the plot is the following:

1. Jesus speaks to John and the church about the fact that He is about to reveal what will happen in the near future in the struggle between Rome and the church.
2. The story is then told in a series of visions that John sees in heaven:
 - God displaying His power
 - Satan displaying his power
 - Satan attacking the church with his allies

- God pronouncing judgment on Satan and his allies and they are thrown into hell
- God and the church rejoice in their victory over Satan and his servants as they take their place in heaven

In the previous chapter we saw God defeating the allies of Satan (the beast, the harlot, the false prophet). In the final two chapters John will describe the end of the demon Satan himself and the final home of the saints: heaven.

FALL OF SATAN, VICTORY OF THE SAINTS, FINAL JUDGMENT – CHAPTER 20

Three main events take place in this chapter.

1. THE FALL OF SATAN – 20:1-3

I said that the story keeps the ringleader and his defeat for the end and we see it here; short, swift and complete.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven,
holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his
hand.

- Revelation 20:1

The angel is the angel who sounds the judgment. It is always an angel who throws the sickle, pours the bowls and sounds the trumpet. Now an angel arrives to announce and bring judgment upon Satan.

The abyss is hell, the place of suffering, the underworld.

And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years

- Revelation 20:2

SATAN IS BOUND FOR 1000 YEARS.

Bound in what way? No power, no effect? Bound in that he will no longer deceive the nations. He deceived the nations into emperor worship and in the past into all forms of idolatry and wickedness. With the gospel now revealed, his power to deceive is severely limited, his power is bound by the truth about him and God (like a dog with a chain tied to a stake in the ground. Do not get too close!).

Bound for how long? 1,000 actual years? Again the numbers are symbolic $10 \times 10 \times 10$ equals 1,000 which is a perfect time. Only God knows when His will is complete, not a minute more or less than is necessary.

Satan is limited in his power for a certain predetermined time (which John will later say is also a time when other things are going to happen).

and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

- Revelation 20:3

SATAN IS RELEASED FOR A SHORT TIME.

The predetermined time of his restraint will end and for a short time he will exercise his influence (to deceive, to blaspheme)

once again. He will make one last push near the end of time and this coincides with Paul's description of the end times in II Thessalonians 2:3-12 where the Apostle says that near the end there will be a "man of lawlessness" revealed and destroyed by Christ. This person will destroy many and be manipulated by Satan in the same way that he manipulated the beast (Roman Empire in John's day).

John leaves Satan's final demise hanging and goes on to describe the victory of the saints.

2. VICTORY OF THE SAINTS – 20:4-10

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

- Revelation 20:4-6

Further comfort is given to the 1st century church as John describes the martyrs, who have been killed in the persecution, alive in heaven and rejoicing with Christ. He also mentions that the other saints will join them in this rejoicing after the 1,000-year reign is over.

Before, these souls were under the altar crying out (chapter 18), but now with the destruction of Satan, they have been vindicated and are on the thrones with Christ. They reign in heaven. The 1,000 years is the time between the binding of Satan (Pentecost when the gospel is preached until just before the return of Christ when the faithful will resurrect).

John mentions the first resurrection and that is the resurrection of the martyrs to be with Christ in heaven. This precedes the “general” resurrection at the return of Jesus. They reign with Christ for the 1,000 years (period within Pentecost and second coming) and their service consists of their witness through martyrdom to the world and encouragement to the saints.

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

- Revelation 20:7-10

This victory is highlighted by Satan’s final destruction. The end of the 1,000-year reign is marked by a brief (could be a year or 2 centuries) period where Satan’s powers are restored and he uses them to try to once again deceive and destroy. His beasts or allies this time are represented by Old Testament nations and enemies of Israel who were destroyed by God: Gog and Magog.

Another “Armageddon-like” image is given. This time to appear at the end of history (end-time prophecy) but this time not only the allies are destroyed but Satan himself meets his final and eternal end: eternal torment.

Bound in the 1st century, released for a short time near the end, Satan is destroyed totally when Jesus comes.

3. FINAL JUDGMENT – VS. 11-15

This is the historical end of the world spoken of by Jesus. Paul and Peter are also described by John in similar fashion:

A great insurrection of evil cut short by Christ’s appearance. The resurrection of the righteous to join the martyrs in heaven; the destruction of the natural universe; the destruction of Satan and the great judgment of the nations. All in the twinkling of an eye.

Here John only describes what happens to those who are not Christ’s, the believers’ end is described in the next two chapters.

As for non-believers, Jesus is on the judgment throne. Everyone is judged according to their names in the book of life (believers) and their deeds (obedience). Everyone is judged. Death and the underworld (Hades) are destroyed because without Satan and sin there will be no death or Hades. Those whose deeds were evil (actual sin, disobedience to Christ) and/or who are not written in the book of life (book of life refers to those who are saved, Christians), these will go into the lake of fire. Note that this is the same place where Satan, the beast, the false prophet have gone. Do not let anyone tell you that hell, a place of eternal suffering, does not exist!

Now that Satan has been judged and sentenced, and John has prepared his readers for the end time when Satan will reappear for a short time; now that the general judgment of the wicked

and unbelievers and their end has also been described; John will complete the book with his final vision of the saints and their place with God in heaven.

FINAL STATE OF THE RIGHTEOUS

21:1-22:5

Once all the enemies have been destroyed (here John includes the present day enemy of the Roman Empire and its persecution of the church as well as future enemies including future persecution by future beasts, Satan himself and death itself) once all of these are gone, John describes what will be the final condition of the saints. They will have:

1. PERFECT FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD – VS. 1-8

A new heaven and new earth refers to a new order of things. The old physical universe is gone and replaced by a new and perfect dimension which will include:

- Vs. 1 – A place where there is no sea (the place of suffering, sea of glass mixed with fire, chapter 5).
- Vs. 2 – A place where the church is perfected and pure (like a bride) without sin.
- Vs. 3-7 – A place where there will be perfect fellowship with God without interruption from the ravages of sin or death.

This will be in contrast with those who were afraid (one talent servant) or those who have not obeyed the gospel or those who have been sinners. These will burn in hell (vs. 8).

Perfect fellowship for the saints; eternal torment for sinners.

2. PERFECT PROTECTION BY GOD – VS. 9-27

An angel provides a closer look and a more detailed description of the bride (the saints, the holy city, the righteous, the church, etc.). The image now is of a holy city.

⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.
- Revelation 21:9-11

John is told what he is about to see. The holy city (church) has God’s brilliance (transfiguration, Moses’ face shining).

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

¹⁵ The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.

¹⁶ The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the

rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.

- Revelation 21:12-16

He describes the city. The wall and the angels at each of the twelve gates refers to safety (impenetrable). Names on the gates of the twelve tribes identifies who lives in the city/church: the people of God as they were referred to in the Old Testament. Twelve foundations with the Apostles' names refers to the people of God as they are known in the New Testament. The city measures 1500 miles on each side, a reference to its size (in human terms, a very big place).

In verses 17 through 27 the city is described in terms of the most beautiful and precious things known to man at that time. It is worth more than anything ever. The light in the city is the Lord Himself, and the Lord is its temple. Note that before, the angel measured a temple and used this as a symbol for God's people. Now that the new heaven and earth are created there is no need for a temple (that was for earthly man). The holy city in the new heaven and earth has no need for a temple where God and man meet, they now dwell together and the Lord is the temple (no more sin to separate them).

People of every walk of life are there and each brings his own unique glory to enhance the city without pride or competition. They remain individuals and not self-centered. Only those who are worthy will live there.

The fact that the city is so big and the walls are so low and the gates are always open shows that it will be a safe place, a free place, a glorious place to be and belong enjoying God's perfect fellowship and perfect protection.

3. GOD'S PERFECT PROVISION – 22:1-5

All is provided for in the Holy City.

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

- Revelation 22:1-2

The river of life, the tree of life with fruit and leaves of healing refer to the sources of eternal life and healing from sin. Sin began with fruit eaten in disobedience, now the same symbol represents healing from sin. Jesus is the living water. Jesus is the vine that produces the branches and the fruit that heals.

³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

- Revelation 22:3-5

There is no temptation to serve the beast, only one will be served and only one mark will mark the people there, not the mark of the beast but the mark of His name on their foreheads, the seal by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). This is a reference to Old Testament priests who had the words "Holy to the Lord" on a gold plate fastened to the turbans they wore on their heads (Exodus 39:30).

There is no competition between light and dark. There is only one throne and only one light. The promise that the saints will reign with Christ is fulfilled here (2 Timothy 2:11).

In the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the saints will dwell in unspeakable beauty, protected and provided for by God Himself who will have a direct relationship with the saints. No priests, no apostles, no preachers or deacons, elders or teachers in heaven. God will provide all, the saints will know and have all.

CONCLUSION - 22:6-21

John has finished his vision of the victorious church in its exalted state. Now he concludes the book with several witnesses and a challenge to his readers.

1. THE WITNESSES – VS. 6-9; 16

The fact that this is a true account is witnessed by three people. By law, only two were needed, three is divine.

A. The angel

And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true”; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

- Revelation 22:6

I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.

- Revelation 22:16

He confesses that the one who sent him was Jesus Himself. All terms refer to Jesus in different biblical ways.

B. Jesus

And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.
- Revelation 22:7

An encouragement to all readers to believe.

C. John

⁸I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. ⁹ But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."
- Revelation 22:8-9

The angel declares John to be a prophet and this is inspired material.

2. THE INSTRUCTIONS – VS. 10-15

Daniel was told to seal up his prophecy until the end (Daniel 12:9). No one would know or understand until the end times (time of fourth empire: Rome). John is told the opposite, the end (of Rome) was near so he had to preach and proclaim the things revealed to him. A final warning concerning the destruction (to Rome) to come and the fact that they will not repent and their end is inevitable, just as the reward for those who are the Lord's is inevitable. Rejoice for yourself, do not worry about them.

3 .INVITATION

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

- Revelation 22:17

Jesus personally invites all those who believe the message of the book to come to Him.

4. FINAL INSTRUCTIONS AND BLESSINGS

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

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

- Revelation 22:18-21

Do not change anything because this is prophecy. The punishment for doing so is severe. Jesus promises to fulfill all these things Himself. The chapters ends with a final blessing from the Lord.

John completes his visions with a direct invitation, warning and blessing from the Lord.

LESSONS

There are many possible sermons and lessons from *Revelation*, but I want to leave you with these three:

1. SATAN IS REAL AND HAS INFLUENCE

This inspired text is all about the damage Satan causes and God's plan to destroy him, his allies, and all those who follow him by **not** believing in Jesus. Satan appears in both *Genesis* and *Revelation*.

The world's greatest deception is thinking Satan is not real or powerful.

2. HELL IS REAL

Again, *Revelation* makes very clear that such a place exists and it is terrible. We do well to be afraid, to make an effort to avoid this place. That is why we work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

3. HEAVEN IS REAL

John describes it in Jewish apocalyptic terms, but over 2,000 years later his point is that heaven is a real place; that it is blissfully beautiful and joyful; that God will dwell there with His people; and that only Christians are there.

This should be an encouragement to those who are Christians to stay faithful and an encouragement to those who are not to become Christians as soon as possible.

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