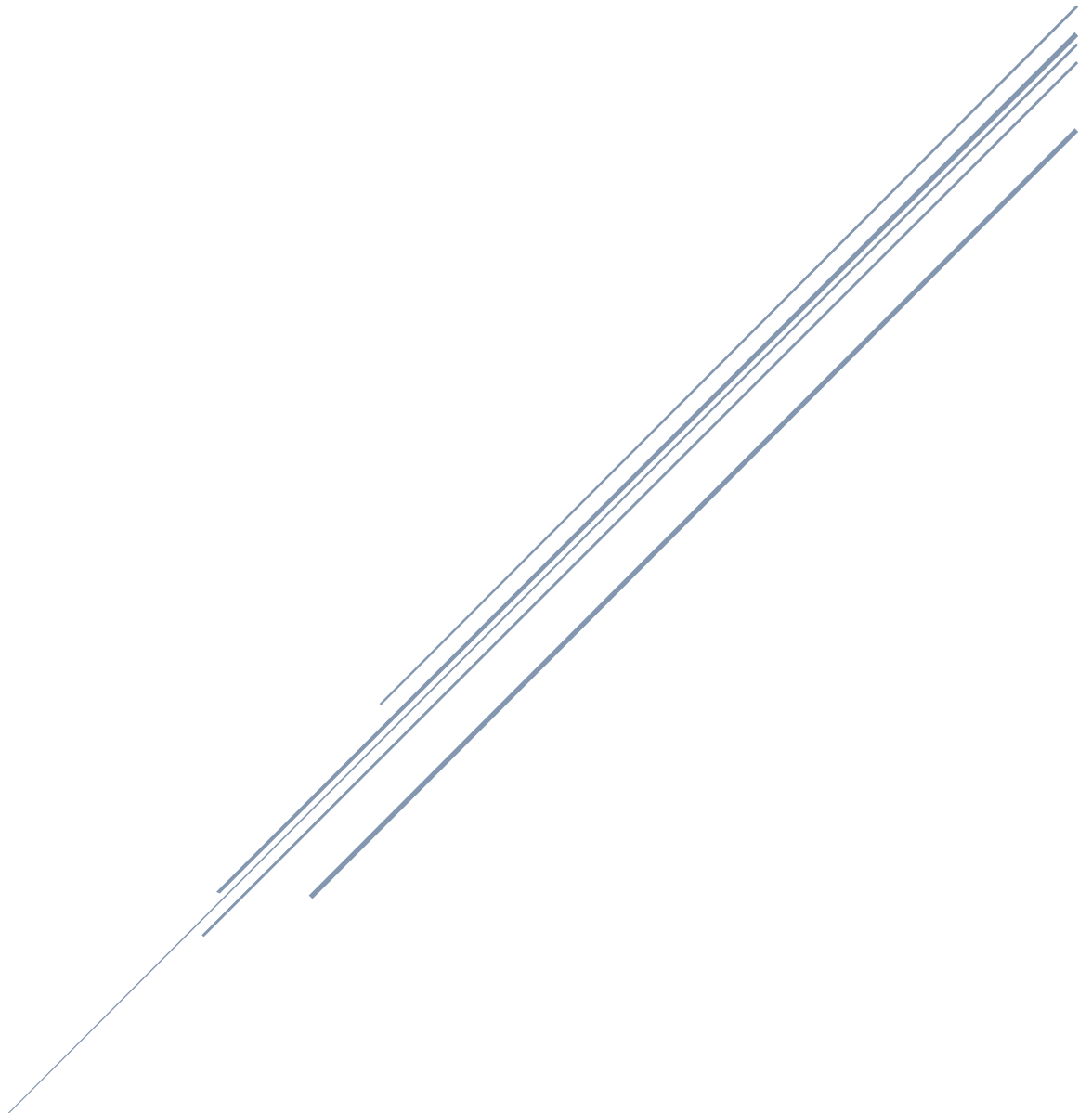


STUDIES IN REVELATION

*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is
written in it, because the time is near. – Revelation 1:3*



Joel Mitchell
pastorjoel@5-mitchells.com

Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Table of Contents | i |
| Main Introduction | vi |
| Glossary of Abbreviations | vii |
| 1:1-8 – Alpha & Omega | 1 |
| Introduction | 1 |
| (1-3) John’s Prologue | 2 |
| (4-8) John’s Greeting..... | 2 |
| 1:9-20 – The Son of Man..... | 4 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| (9-11) The Setting: Patmos | 4 |
| (12-17a) Jesus in His Glory | 4 |
| (17b-20) Jesus’ Words..... | 5 |
| Conclusion..... | 6 |
| 2-3 – Overview of the 7 Churches..... | 7 |
| The Identity of the Churches | 7 |
| The Structure of the Letters..... | 9 |
| 2:1-7 – Ephesus..... | 10 |
| (1) Greeting | 10 |
| (2-4...6) Evaluation | 10 |
| (5) Application..... | 11 |
| (7) Promise | 12 |
| 2:8-11 – Smyrna | 13 |
| (8) Greeting..... | 13 |
| (9) Evaluation | 13 |
| (10) Application..... | 14 |
| (11) Promise..... | 15 |
| Smyrna in Later Church History: | 15 |
| 2:12-29 – Pergamum & Thyatira..... | 16 |
| Pergamum..... | 16 |
| Thyatira | 17 |
| 3:1-6 – Sardis..... | 20 |
| (1a) Greeting | 20 |

| | |
|--|----|
| (1b-2, 4) Evaluation..... | 20 |
| (3) Application..... | 20 |
| (4-6) Promises..... | 22 |
| 3:7-13 – Philadelphia..... | 23 |
| (7) Greeting..... | 23 |
| (8) Evaluation..... | 23 |
| (9-10) Promises – Part 1..... | 23 |
| (11) Application..... | 24 |
| (12-13) Promises – Part 2..... | 24 |
| 3:14-22 – Laodicea..... | 25 |
| Introduction..... | 25 |
| (14) Greeting..... | 25 |
| (15-17) Evaluation..... | 25 |
| (18-20) Application..... | 26 |
| (21-22) Promise..... | 27 |
| 4-5 – Worthy!..... | 28 |
| Introduction..... | 28 |
| (4) The Throne Room of God..... | 28 |
| (5) The Scroll & the Lamb..... | 29 |
| Conclusion..... | 31 |
| Daniel 2, 7, 8, 11 – The Five Kingdoms..... | 32 |
| Introduction..... | 32 |
| Fulfilled Prophecy..... | 32 |
| Future Events..... | 33 |
| Conclusion..... | 34 |
| Daniel 9, 11, 12 – The Seventy ‘Sevens’..... | 35 |
| Introduction..... | 35 |
| (9:24) The Nature and Purpose of the 70 “Sevens”..... | 35 |
| (9:25-27) Overview of the Seventy “Sevens”..... | 35 |
| Chart: The 70 Sevens..... | 36 |
| More Information on the “King Who Is to Come” & the 70 th Week..... | 36 |
| Chart: Timing of Establishment of the Kingdom (Daniel 12:11-12)..... | 37 |
| Applications..... | 37 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 6 – The Wrath of God Unleashed | 39 |
| Introduction | 39 |
| First 6 Seal Judgments..... | 39 |
| Timing of the judgments..... | 41 |
| Chart: Comparison of Matthew 24 & Revelation 6..... | 42 |
| Applications..... | 42 |
| 7 – Who Is Able To stand?..... | 43 |
| Introduction | 43 |
| (1-8) The 144,000..... | 43 |
| (9-17) The Great Multitude..... | 44 |
| Conclusion..... | 45 |
| 8-9 – The 7 th Seal/6 Trumpets..... | 46 |
| Introduction | 46 |
| (8:1-5) The Seventh Seal – Prelude..... | 46 |
| (8:6-13) The First Four Trumpets – Plagues Against Nature..... | 46 |
| (8:13-9:21) The “Woes” – Judgments Against Mankind..... | 47 |
| Conclusion..... | 49 |
| 10 – The Angel & The Scroll | 50 |
| Introduction | 50 |
| (1-4) The Angel’s Description..... | 50 |
| (5-7) The Angel’s Message | 51 |
| (8-11) The Little Scroll | 51 |
| Conclusion..... | 52 |
| 11:1-14 – The Two Witnesses | 53 |
| Introduction | 53 |
| (1-2) The Measuring of the Temple | 53 |
| (3-6) The Ministry of the Two Witnesses..... | 54 |
| (7-13) Their Death and Resurrection | 55 |
| (14) The Timing of Their Ministry | 56 |
| Conclusion..... | 56 |
| Charts: Timing of the Two Witnesses’ Ministry | 57 |
| 11:15-12:17 – The End Is Near | 58 |
| Introduction | 58 |

| | |
|--|----|
| (11:15-19) The 7 th Trumpet Sounds | 58 |
| (12:1-17) The “Great Sign in Heaven” | 59 |
| Conclusion..... | 61 |
| 13 – Satan’s Puppets..... | 62 |
| Introduction | 62 |
| (1-10) The Beast from the Sea | 62 |
| (11-18) The Beast from the Earth | 64 |
| Conclusion..... | 65 |
| 14 – Triumph & Warnings..... | 66 |
| Introduction | 66 |
| (1-5) The 144,000 Triumphant..... | 66 |
| (6-13) Various Messages..... | 67 |
| (14-20) The Reaping of the Earth..... | 68 |
| Conclusion:..... | 68 |
| 15-16 – Wrath Poured Out | 69 |
| Introduction | 69 |
| (15) Prelude to the Final Judgments..... | 69 |
| (16) The Bowl Judgments..... | 69 |
| Conclusion..... | 71 |
| 17:1-19:5 – Fallen Is Babylon | 72 |
| Introduction | 72 |
| Chart: Babylon Identical in Chapters 17 & 18..... | 72 |
| (17) The Prostitute on the Beast..... | 72 |
| (18:1-19:5) Reactions to Babylon’s Destruction | 74 |
| Conclusion..... | 76 |
| 19:6-21 – The End of the World as We Know It..... | 77 |
| Introduction | 77 |
| (6-10) The Marriage Feast of the Lamb | 77 |
| (11-21) The Second Coming of Christ | 78 |
| (17-21) The Battle of Armageddon | 79 |
| Conclusion..... | 79 |
| 20:1-10 – Your Kingdom Come | 80 |
| Introduction | 80 |

| | |
|---|----|
| (1-3) Satan Bound | 80 |
| (4-6) The Thousand Years | 81 |
| (7-10) The Final Rebellion | 82 |
| Conclusion..... | 83 |
| 20:11-21:8 – New Beginning..... | 85 |
| (20:11-15) The Great White Throne | 85 |
| (21:1-8) The New Heaven & Earth | 86 |
| Conclusion..... | 87 |
| 21:9-22:5 – Finally Home | 88 |
| Introduction | 88 |
| (21:9-22) The Outside of the City..... | 88 |
| (21:22-22:2) The Inside of the City and Its Inhabitants | 90 |
| (3-5) A Summary | 91 |
| Conclusion..... | 91 |
| Revelation 22:6-21 – I Am Coming Quickly..... | 92 |
| Introduction/Review | 92 |
| (6-7) The Timing..... | 92 |
| (8-9) Another Misunderstanding | 93 |
| (10-17) The Eternal Consequences of the Second Coming..... | 93 |
| (18-19) A Solemn Warning..... | 94 |
| (20-21) Conclusion: Jesus Is Coming!..... | 94 |
| Bibliography | 95 |

Main Introduction

Some Christians treat the book of Revelation like a true horror story or gruesome non-fiction geopolitical thriller. However, this book is not meant to frighten or entertain God's people. It is meant to give us hope and courage to press on in our faith. [Revelation 1:3](#) promises a blessing for those who read, hear, and take to heart the things written in this book. These notes seek to bring out the blessings of understanding, guidance, and encouragement found in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

What follows is a lightly-edited version of the study/speaking notes from 27 Bible studies originally presented at Calvary Baptist Church of Boonville, Indiana. The goals for this series were:

- Provide a basic overview of "end times" events (clearly distinguishing between what God's Word actually says and merely human speculation about how the details might play out)
- Show how Christians should live in light of the truths found in this book

Because I did not originally plan to publish this as a paper, I did not include scholarly citations of sources as I studied (though I did give credit if I directly quoted someone). The sources I found most useful and consulted most frequently can be found in the bibliography at the end of the notes.

I pray that these notes are helpful to you as you seek the blessings of this unique book of the Bible.

Glossary of Abbreviations

- e.g. = for example
- ff = and following / and the verses that come after this one
- i.e. = that is / in other words
- KJV = King James Version (I teach from the NIV or ESV, but many people use the KJV so I have attempted to note when its wording is significantly different or confusing)
- NT = New Testament
- OT = Old Testament
- v. = verse
- vv. = verses

1:1-8 – Alpha & Omega

Prologue & Introduction

Introduction

- There is always great interest in predictions about the future, especially those involving the end of the world and/or dawning of a new age.
 - o E.g. Cold War nuclear holocaust fears, the Y2K bug, the Mayan calendar
 - o Certain ancient writings about this topic are referred to as *apocalyptic* and tend to contain heavy use of symbolism with angels functioning as guides and interpreters.
 - Sample of (non-inspired) ancient Jewish and Gnostic Apocalyptic literature: Ascension of Isaiah, Assumption of Moses, Book of Enoch, Book of Jubilees, Greek Apocalypse of Baruch, Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch, Letter of Aristeas, III & IV Maccabees, Psalms of Solomon, Secrets of Enoch, Testament of the 12 Patriarchs, Revelation of St. Steven and Thomas, Decree of Galeasius, The Apocalypse of Sedrach, The Apocalypse of Peter, The Apocalypse of Paul, The Second Apocalypse of John, The Apocalypse of the Virgin
 - Note: These books do not have any spiritual authority.
 - Paul rejects Jewish folklore as a source of spiritual truth ([Titus 1:14](#)).
 - Gnosticism was a false religion that tried to combine elements of Christianity, Greek philosophy, and various mystery religions.
 - The Bible's two main Apocalyptic books are Daniel & Revelation (the writings of some of the other prophets also have apocalyptic elements).
- Many people try to interpret Revelation allegorically (not literally).
 - o Some interpret it as being about persecution of the church in John's Day.
 - They see it as a way for John to talk about the persecution under Emperor Nero or Emperor Diocletian "in code" and encourage Christians to remain faithful.
 - In this view, there is little or no element of future prophecy in the book.
 - o Some make it just a dramatic, encouraging story of the eventual triumph of good over evil where the details shouldn't be taken at all literally (some details symbolize other things, and some are just there to add "a sense of glory/triumph").
- When we interpret Revelation at face value, like we do the rest of the Bible, it is a detailed preview of the final 1,007 year of planet earth as we know it and a glimpse into God's kingdom.
 - o We certainly recognize that there is a lot of symbolism in this book, but its presence is generally indicated with phrases like "a sign," "[X] is [Y]," "[X] represents [Y]" "I will show you the interpretation," etc.
 - o We also recognize that the basic meaning of most of the symbols is relatively clear.
 - Either it is interpreted right in the context (usually by an angel), or it is a symbol that is commonly used and easily understood elsewhere in the Bible (e.g. Jesus as the lamb that was slain).
 - We can't give the symbols any meaning that happens to make sense to us or fit our pet theory when the immediate context has already provided an interpretation.

- Objections to studying Revelation:
 - “It’s impossible to understand.”
 - While the exact sequence of events and some specific details are not always clear, the overall message of the book is not incomprehensible.
 - We can take most of it literally, and when symbols occur, they are usually explained in the context.
 - 1,900+ years of study has produced many good study helps.
 - “It’s scary and depressing.”
 - While the book describes many terrible things, they aren’t the main focus.
 - The focus of the book is Jesus Christ ([1:1](#)) glorified as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, removing evil from the earth once and for all, and setting up the perfect eternal kingdom where we will live forever...that should be exciting!
 - Part of the blessing of this book is surely the encouragement it gives us of a bright and glorious future, even when things look bad now.

[\(1-3\) John’s Prologue](#)

- The meaning of the word *Revelation/Apocalypse* is *unveiling/disclosure/making known*.
- It is from God the Father *through* Jesus Christ and *about* Jesus Christ and deals with coming events.
 - Because it helps us know Christ better, it is of value to all Christians.
 - In the Gospels, we get to know Jesus as the perfect suffering sacrifice for sin, but in the events recorded in Revelation we get to know him as the glorious ruler of all.
- It is delivered to John, mostly through angelic messengers.
 - John is described as one who bore witness to Jesus Christ.
 - We can safely assume that this is John the apostle (brother of James, son of Zebedee).
- Special blessing is promised to those who read, hear, and apply the teachings of this book.
 - Separate blessings for reader and hearer is probably because most people wouldn’t have had their own copy at first, and not very many could read (estimated 10%).
 - No other book of the Bible comes with such a clearly stated blessing.
 - Maybe God included this because he knows that this *is* a difficult book to understand, but He wants to encourage us to make the effort to learn from it. Difficulty should not deter us from seeking God’s blessing.

[\(4-8\) John’s Greeting](#)

- [\(4a\)](#) The original recipients are 7 churches at major cities in Western Asia:
 - Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, & Laodicea (v. [11](#))
 - These were literal churches not just symbolic representations of certain historical eras (more on them in chapter 2).

- (4b-6) Grace and Peace from God Himself:
 - *Grace* is undeserved favor, and *peace* is calm assurance/security no matter what.
 - He has already saved us from judgment ([I Thessalonians 5:8-11](#)).
 - Even this book that speaks quite a bit about judgment is ultimately a reminder of God's grace and peace to those of us who belong to Him.
 - Various names are given for the Three members of the Godhead who are all intimately involved in our lives.
 - The One who was and is and is to come is the Always-existing Father in control of all history from eternity past to present to eternity future
 - The Seven Spirits/Sevenfold Spirit is an odd-sounding reference to the Holy Spirit.
 - Seven is the number that often seems to be used to symbolize perfection or completeness, which may be the case here.
 - [Isaiah 11:1-2](#) – One of the OT passages that most thoroughly describes the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Messiah (Jesus) describes the Holy Spirit using seven titles.
 - Jesus Christ – John can't help but declare the greatness of our Lord and Savior who loved us so much that he died and rose again for us and made us "a kingdom of priests" (those who have direct access to God).

- (7) John previews the climax of the whole book: Jesus is coming again (quotes from [Daniel 7:13](#) and [Zechariah 12:10](#))!
 - The whole book covers the events leading up to that moment & the eternal results of it.
 - For those left on earth not having trusted him it will be a bitter event.
 - For us, it is something to look forward to (Amen = it is true/may it be so!).

- (8) The Lord stresses his sovereign control over all things.
 - *Alpha* (A/α) & *Omega* (Ω/ω) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet (equivalent of "A to Z").
 - This book is all about the acts of sovereign God in history (with a primary focus on the last 1,007 years of the current planet earth).
 - It includes both judgment on the wicked who are left behind on the earth and praise and blessing in heaven.
 - It is not something to be afraid or depressed about. It is the final drawing together of all the parts of God's plan. For us, it is the time when our salvation is fully realized ([Ephesians 1:7-10](#)).

1:9-20 – The Son of Man

The Vision Begins

Introduction

- This is the actual start of John's vision.
- He has given us a preview of his subject matter and now the rest of the book is what God showed him for our benefit.

(9-11) The Setting: Patmos

- John has been exiled there by the government of the emperor Domitian for being a Christian.
 - o This was a time of persecution for Christians as Emperor Domitian (ruled 81-96 AD) tried to strengthen the worship of the Roman gods (including of himself as emperor).
 - o Patmos is a small rocky island where John, who was probably in his 80's, may have been forced to work in the mines.
- *On the Lord's day* probably refers to Sunday, but some suggest it refers to being swept forward to the End Times which is often referred to as *the Day of the Lord*.
- While under the influence of the Holy Spirit He receives a command to write what he is about to see for the benefit of the 7 churches.
 - o It is probable that he enters some sort of trance like that of Peter in [Acts 10:9-10](#).
 - o He turns around to see who is speaking to him and the vision begins.

(12-17a) Jesus in His Glory

- [\(12-13a\)](#) The title "one like a son of man" comes from [Daniel 7:9-14](#).
 - o It is the title Jesus uses for himself most often in the Gospels.
 - o It speaks of his humanity, but even more of his deity.
 - He is the One with the right to rule the universe forever from the throne of God.
 - It is when Jesus applies this passage to himself at his trial that he is declared guilty of blasphemy ([Mark 14:61-64](#)).
- [\(13b-16\)](#) Jesus' appearance emphasizes his majesty and power.
 - o Majesty/Glory: Pure white hair (like that of the Ancient of Days/Father in [Daniel 7:9](#)), eyes blazing like fire, face shining like the sun, girdle of gold, glowing feet
 - o Power/Authority: a voice like many waters (think: Niagara Falls), a sword going out of his mouth (this shows up again in [19:15](#) where he slays the wicked)
- He is surrounded by 7 golden lampstands (KJV candlesticks, but Middle Eastern cultures used olive oil lamps, not candles) and has 7 stars in his hand (we'll get to these shortly).

- (17a) John's response: he faints dead away
 - o John was "the disciple Jesus loved"...possibly the man who knew him best when he was here on earth the first time and he is still completely overwhelmed.
 - o Those who catch a glimpse of God's glory are always overwhelmed when they realize how small, weak, and sinful they are next to Holy, Almighty God.
 - E.g. [Isaiah 6:5](#)
 - The Son is every bit as much God as the Father ([Hebrews 1:3](#)).

(17b-20) Jesus' Words

- (17b-18) Do not be afraid:
 - o Jesus is in control of all things (the first and the last).
 - o Even death and hades (the afterlife) are under his control.
 - o Death has no hold on him and since we are in him, it has no hold on us.
 - Next to Him, we know we are small, weak, and sinful.
 - However, we are not insignificant.
 - He loves us with a perfect love.
 - Through his death, he has made us perfect in God's eyes and adopted as his children.
 - Through his resurrection he guarantees us eternal life.
 - When we finally get to see him face to face we will be made perfectly like him ([1 John 3:1-2](#)).
- (19) He tells John to write what he sees, past, present, and future.
 - o This is a nice outline of the book.
 - Past: chapter 1 - what John has just seen
 - Present: chapters 2-3 - the current spiritual state of the seven churches
 - Future: chapters 4-22 - the longest portion of the book as noted in verse 1
 - o This is a message that God wants us to have, and that means it is spiritually profitable, not just a source of morbid curiosity or fodder for pointless theological arguments.
- (20) He interprets the lampstands and the stars.
 - o Remember, Revelation *is* full of symbolism, but that symbolism is almost always either a commonly used symbol drawn from elsewhere in Scripture, or it is explained almost immediately in context.
 - o The lampstands are the seven churches he is writing to
 - These are seven literal churches that existed at that time (some people also interpret them with additional significance, which will be discussed later).
 - This is an appropriate symbol since Christians being light is frequently repeated in the NT ([Matthew 5:16](#), [Romans 13:12](#), [Ephesians 5:8](#), [Philippians 2:14-15](#)).

- The seven stars are “the angels of the seven churches”
 - This is an example of something that is difficult to understand even when an explanation is given.
 - *Angel* literally means *messenger* with context being the only way to determine whether it means human messenger or angelic being.
 - Whoever these “angels” are, they appear to be able to communicate with the local church and are at least partially responsible for the spiritual welfare of the churches.
 - Option 1: an angelic being assigned to the church in some way (There is no mention of this anywhere else in the New Testament.)
 - Option 2: the human messengers in charge of carrying the letter
 - Option 3: the churches’ pastors as those who bring the message from God to the people – I’m inclined to this view, but it isn’t “a hill to die on.”
- In chapters 2-3 we will see what Jesus says directly to these churches (and, by extension, to other churches and believers who find themselves in similar situations).
- For now: Jesus is intimately involved and ultimately in charge of the ministry of these churches. The Lord of the universe cares about and watches over how we serve him.

Conclusion

Don’t fear the future. Glorious, Almighty God who loves us and gave himself for us is in charge (and has even given us this “preview” of how it ends as an encouragement to serve him faithfully)!

2-3 – Overview of the 7 Churches

The Identity of the Churches

Literal Meaning: Seven Local Churches Existing in John's Day

- There is no reason to think that these are not literal churches.

- Some of these places appear elsewhere in the New Testament:
 - o Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus (the book of Ephesians) and mentioned the church in Laodicea ([Colossians 2:1](#)).
 - o Lydia was from Thyatira ([Acts 16:14](#)).

- These are the original recipients of the book of Revelation ([Revelation 1:4, 11](#)).

- The order in which the churches are addressed reflects the order in which a messenger going from Patmos would encounter them as he went north up the coast and then south along an inland trade route.

Allegorical Meaning: An Overview of Church History

Explanation of This View

- This view is quite popular even among people who take the seven churches as literal churches.
 - o They are interpreted as being real churches that *also* have a “deeper spiritual meaning.”
 - o Most of the time we (dispensational premillennialists) reject allegorical interpretation, but since Revelation is full of symbols anyway, some people are okay with it here.

- This view states that each church also represents a certain period of church history.

- One common example:
 - o Ephesus represents the end of the Apostolic period and early post-apostolic church (AD 70-170).
 - o Smyrna represents the heavily persecuted church under the Roman Empire (AD 170-312).
 - o Pergamum represents the time in which the church was united with the Roman government starting with Emperor Constantine (AD 312-606).
 - o Thyatira represents the Dark Ages (AD 606-1517).
 - o Sardis represents the Protestant Reformation (AD 1517-1740).
 - o Philadelphia represents the time of great missionary activity (AD 1740-1900).
 - o Laodicea represents a time of growing spiritual apathy and apostasy (AD 1900-rapture).

Weaknesses of This View

- There is nothing in the context that suggests these churches are in any way symbolic.
 - o Coming up with symbolic meanings when the Bible is not clear that there is one is risky.
 - o It often says more about our own creativity in connecting similar ideas than it does about what God intended to communicate.

- There is much disagreement of how the various churches match up with church history.
 - o I have found at least three radically differing time schemes.
 - o E.g. Every commentator (no matter when he is writing) seems to think that the “Laodicean age” of apathy started 40-60 years before his time of writing.
 - o This is one problem with allegorical interpretation: it is very subjective. Everyone has their own take on it, and there is no concrete standard for measuring accuracy since the interpretation goes far beyond what God has actually said.

- The identifications are often a stretch.
 - o There seems to be a lot of (intentional) “cherry picking” or (unintentional) “confirmation bias” involved – people notice and emphasize characteristics and events that support their view and ignore ones that do not.
 - o E.g. 170-312 *was* characterized at times by intense government persecution like the church at Smyrna... but so was the 100 years that came before it (under Emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius).
 - o E.g. the church of the Dark ages generally *did* tolerate horrible behavior within the church like the church of Thyatira, but it was *not* known for Thyatira’s “love, faith, patience, and perseverance” ([2:19](#)) ...quite the contrary (crusades, inquisitions, indulgences, etc.).

- It calls into question the imminence (could occur at any time) of the rapture for past Christians
 - o If the church must get through 7 eras of history, then Christ’s return could not have been imminent until sometime after the start of the “Laodicean Age” (which all commentators conveniently think has already begun).
 - o To me, this is the biggest weakness because it would mean that the many, many passages about watching, waiting, and being ready (e.g. [Luke 12:40](#), [Philippians 3:20](#), [Hebrews 10:25](#)) were irrelevant to Christians until sometime in the last 50-150 years.

Understanding & Applying

- Remember, there are things in this book that are not future prophecy...in the outline of “what was, what is now, and what will be” ([1:19](#)), chapters 2-3 are mostly “what is now” (i.e. the present from John’s perspective).

- A better option than allegory: these 7 local churches have a variety of strengths, weaknesses, and living conditions that are common to local churches throughout history.
 - o Certain strengths, weaknesses, and living conditions may have been more common at certain times in history, but to see this as a prediction of church history is non-literal and highly subjective.
 - o We can learn from their strengths and weaknesses just like we can learn from the strengths and weaknesses of the churches to whom Paul, John, Peter, etc. wrote. Any local church probably resembles one or more of these churches in one or more ways.
 - o This is emphasized by the fact that each letter ends with “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
 - o Chapters 2-3 are “life application time,” not “roadmap of future events time”!

The Structure of the Letters

- Greeting:
 - To...: Each is addressed to the messenger of the church (probably a reference to the church leadership who will share it with the whole church).
 - From...: The description of Jesus comes from John's vision of Jesus in chapter 1 and emphasize an aspect of his character that is important to that particular church.
 - Our peace and motivation for faithful godly living come from our understanding of who God is and who we are in Christ.

- Evaluation: Jesus praises the church for its good qualities and actions and/or rebukes them for bad qualities and actions.
 - This is an opportunity for us to evaluate ourselves.
 - Self-evaluation can help us be joyful about what God is doing in our life ([Galatians 6:3-5](#)).
 - Self-evaluation can help us avoid discipline from God ([I Corinthians 11:31-32](#)).

- Application: Jesus tells the church what they need to do in the future based on his evaluation of them.
 - Praise is not a reason to become smug, and rebuke is not a reason to despair.
 - When God's Word acts as a mirror to our life, we must act on what we have learned, whether that means courageously persevering or radically changing our behavior ([James 1:23-25](#)).

- Promises: Jesus wraps up with promises for "the overcomers."
 - In the context of John's writings, *overcomers* refers to all who are saved ([I John 5:4-5](#), [Revelation 21:7-8](#)).
 - Jesus can make these encouraging promises because he has overcome ([John 16:33](#)).

2:1-7 – Ephesus

(1) Greeting

- In Chapter 1, the lampstands represented the churches and the stars the church leaders.
- The emphasis is on Jesus' close relationship with his churches.
 - o This is both in terms of loving security and of ultimate control over them.
 - o i.e. This is both "I'm here for you to help you" and "I'm watching and evaluating you and will act accordingly."

(2-4...6) Evaluation

(2-3...6) Commendations

(2a, 3) *They work patiently and diligently.*

- They are working hard at doing the things that need to be done to keep the church running.
- They are doing so with a good attitude rather than becoming discouraged.
 - o Some things that can cause churches to become discouraged: lack of growth or other visible results, financial difficulties, opposition, persecution, etc.
 - o Perseverance in difficult circumstances is a demonstration of faith that pleases God.
 - I trust God enough to keep serving him even if I don't notice any results.
 - I recognize that He might be bringing about a different result than I expect (e.g. [Isaiah 6:9-13](#) and other OT prophets who saw very few people repent).
 - I know He hasn't lost control even if it looks like it.

They are doing a good job of supporting sound teaching and moral living

- For them, this especially takes the form of rejecting false doctrine and its results.
- They reject those who claim to speak with apostolic authority but do not.
 - o Their falseness is proven when their message contradicts the teachings of Jesus and his true apostles ("Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ" – [II John 9](#)).
 - o Modern examples of churches that vehemently claim apostolic authority but teach additional things that are clearly contrary to Scripture are the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormonism)
 - E.g. "Let us entrust the new year to Mary, Mother of God, so that peace and mercy may grow throughout the world." – Pope Francis
 - Don't look to the leaders of false religions for spiritual guidance!
- They hate the sinful practices brought about by false doctrine.
 - o We don't really know any details about the Nicolaitans.
 - Apparently, they claimed to be Christians or compatible with Christianity.
 - Their teachings led to sinful behavior (Legalism? Lawlessness?).

- There is often a temptation to embrace false teachings that allow us to explain away the sinfulness of certain behaviors that we *really* wish God was okay with.
 - Maybe so we can commit them ourselves
 - Maybe so we won't be perceived as "narrow-minded" by society in general
 - Current examples of sins that are frequently explained away/justified: sexual immorality, improper divorce/remarriage, women serving as pastors, legalism
- Rather than embracing interpretive loopholes that contradict the plain meaning of God's Word, the Ephesians hated sinful behavior.
 - Their righteous living was not motivated by fear of punishment, but by disgust for sin: if God hates it, so did they!
 - They cannot stand to justify or participate in behavior for which Jesus suffered the wrath of God.
- Many Christians have taken up the cry of "doctrine divides," but accurately understanding God's Word without compromise clearly matters to Jesus and he commends this local church for it.

(4) Rebuke

- The accusation: they do not have the kind of love that they once had.
 - Many preachers and commentators tie this to a lack of "new convert enthusiasm."
 - While there may be some of that going on here, that isn't the main point.
 - The church with the general lack of enthusiasm/zeal is Laodicea. These Ephesians have already been commended as diligent and zealous.
 - Their issue is a lack of enthusiasm for specific acts of love that they used to do (v. 5).
- [Ephesians 1:15](#) tells us what their love looked like at first.
 - Their faith in Jesus overflowed into love that was directed toward all other Christians.
 - [1 John 4:19-21](#) – the effect of true wholehearted love for God is love for others (which is especially visible in our treatment of fellow-Christians).
 - [1 John 3:16-18](#) – It is love that helps others out, even at personal expense (of money, possessions, time, etc.).
- Basically, Ephesus is the church that is doctrinally pure but acts of love have taken the backseat.
 - I think that this is a fitting description of many doctrinally conservative churches.
 - They will not be fooled by Satan into compromising what God's Word says.
 - There is a lack of family love and a slowness to respond to the needs of fellow-Christians. Mostly they are known for being argumentative.
 - This mindset can easily slip into legalism: When love is pushed into the background, preferences can get elevated to the level of doctrine, and making sure that everyone is just like us and does things exactly how we would do them becomes the focus.

(5) Application

- Compare how much love is being shown now vs. how much there used to be.
 - When there is a change for the worse in Christ-like attitudes or behavior, it should be acknowledged with sorrow.
 - Confession is about saying the same thing about our sin as God.

- Repent
 - *Repentance* expresses the idea of turning around and going back the other way.
 - It is not only sorrow and acknowledgment of sin, but also deliberately going back to the right way of living with the help of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
 - In this case, it would mean demonstrating that genuine concern for others that flows out of a true love for God.
 - Continuing in a course that we know to be wrong will eventually result in God's discipline.
 - In the case of this local church: they may cease to exist as a church.
 - [John 13:34-35](#) – a church where the members do not often demonstrate true love is seriously lacking in the very thing that makes them identifiable as followers of Jesus (no matter how doctrinally pure they are in all other matters).

[\(Z\) Promise](#)

- Everyone is admonished to listen to this message.
 - Every church and individual Christian can learn from the examples of these churches.
 - We should all seek doctrinal purity, but avoid pushing acts of love into the background.
- The blessing: eating of the tree of life in heaven
 - First seen in the garden of Eden. God will restore all things to better than before.
 - This is a reminder to help “fire up” our love for God who lovingly gives us a perfect eternity.

2:8-11 – Smyrna

(8) Greeting

- To: Smyrna
 - It is mentioned only here in the Bible, but other early historical writings show it to be a city where Christians were heavily persecuted.
 - It is still a major city today (now called Izmir) with a population of 4.5 million.
 - There are about 10 Protestant churches in town.
 - There are an estimated less than 4,000 Protestant Christians in all of Turkey.
- From: The first and the last, who was dead and is now alive
 - Emphasis is on His control of all history.
 - [Isaiah 45:5-7](#) – God takes ultimate credit for everything that happens in history.
 - [Isaiah 46:9-10](#) – Nothing that happens contradicts God’s ultimate purpose.
 - [Romans 8:28-29](#) – If we belong to him, that purpose includes our eternal good.
 - We won’t always understand what God is doing, but if we trust his goodness and love, his sovereign control should bring us comfort.
 - Emphasis is on his power over death.
 - We have heard about the resurrection often enough that we may not really think about it.
 - From the point of view of this physical world that we live in, death is the most final and inevitable thing in human experience.
 - In [1:18](#) Jesus described himself as having the keys of (control over) death and the grave, and to prove it he himself “un-died.”
 - Jesus emphasizes these things to the church at Smyrna because they find themselves in difficult, painful, and even dangerous circumstances.

(9) Evaluation

- Jesus is aware of what is going on in their lives.
- *Affliction* (KJV *tribulation*) is a general term for distressing trouble or oppression.
 - While everything that happens is ultimately a part of God’s plan, that doesn’t mean that we must act as if we aren’t saddened or hurt by distressing thing that happen to us or around us.
 - [Isaiah 63:9](#), describing Israel’s suffering and deliverance, says: “In all their distress he [God] too was distressed.” Empathy is a godly trait.
 - Illustration: taking your child in for painful medical treatment hurts you too, but you know that it is for their good.
- The word used for *poverty* is for extreme poverty.
 - “Where is my next meal going to come from?” not “I can only afford to buy groceries that are on sale and I have to wear clothes from Goodwill.”
 - As an encouragement, Jesus reminds them that they are spiritually/eternally rich ([James 2:5](#), [Matthew 6:19-21](#)).

- Financial prosperity is not a promised part of the Christian life.
 - There are times when living with godly integrity puts you at a disadvantage in the world of employment and business.
 - We are repeatedly promised that faithful service now produces treasure in eternity (and eternity lasts infinitely longer than this world).
- *Slander* (KJV – *blasphemy*) is evil things being said about them and their faith.
 - E.g. of common ancient slanders: atheists, cannibals, incestuous perverts
 - E.g. of common current slanders: hateful bigots, narrow-minded spoilsports, followers of ignorant superstitions
 - The source is false Jews.
 - These are people who are born as Jews but do not have a true relationship with God ([Romans 2:28-29](#)) and act as a group who (unconsciously) serve Satan.
 - A modern equivalent is people who claim to be spiritual but whose rejection and mockery of the truth shows their spirituality to be worthless before God.
- When we go through hard times it is not because God has gotten distracted by something else.
 - Jesus is assuring the Christians at Smyrna that he knows about the affliction, poverty, and slander they are going through.
 - He gives them encouragement.

(10) Application

- Do not be afraid; remain faithful (i.e. Don't give up on living a godly life).
 - ...not because things are going to get better in the immediate future. For these people things are about to get worse!
 - Ten days of intense persecution are coming for the church in Smyrna.
 - Some people suggest various symbolic meanings for *ten days*, but Jesus seems to be speaking literally.
 - They can remain fearless and faithful even until death because death is not the end.
 - Death is a step into the best stage of eternal life.
 - Justin Martyr – “They can kill us but they cannot actually harm us.”
 - The “crown of life” may refer to eternal life itself or to a specific reward for those who suffer martyrdom. The “crown” is an athlete’s reward for victory.
- Notice that Jesus never tells them the ultimate reason for their suffering.
 - There are a variety of reasons that God allows suffering:
 - To shape us into mature Christians ([James 1:2-4](#))
 - To purify the church and spread the Gospel ([Acts 8:1-4](#))
 - Notice that Jesus has nothing negative to say about this church.
 - When it costs something (money, reputation, friends, your life) to be a Christian, you often find out who is serious about their faith.
 - To prevent pride and teach dependence on Him ([II Corinthians 12:7-10](#))
 - God asks us to trust him not because we understand what is going on, but because we know that he loves us and we trust that he knows what he is doing.

(11) Promise

- This starts with the usual reminder that what is said to this church has application to everyone.
- Those who are victorious (true Christians) need have no fear of the second death.
 - o *Second death* is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire ([Revelation 21:8](#)).
 - o The negative is stated in the most emphatic way possible: There is absolutely no way that you will ever be hurt by the second death.
- You belong to God: live fearlessly and faithfully when you face distressing circumstances, poverty, slander, or even death!

Smyrna in Later Church History:

- Evidently this church took Jesus' words very much to heart because about 60 years later (+/- 10 years) we have an eyewitness account of the martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna.
 - o Polycarp was the pastor of the church at Smyrna (and a disciple of the apostle John).
 - These events happened when he was 86 years old.
 - Depending on how young he was when he became pastor he could be the one to whom this letter was originally addressed!
 - o A few summary passages from *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (various translations available online at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/martyrdompolycarp.html>):
 - Chapter 4 – deliberately bringing persecution on yourself is an act of pride that can easily lead to failure.
 - 8:2, 9:1-3 – faithful against blasphemers
 - Chapter 11 – no fear of death because the second death has no power over him
 - Chapter 17 – Satan as adversary / crown of life / a statement of faith
 - Chapter 21 – Jesus Christ is the one who reigns over all.
- Right now: Pastor Andrew Brunson has been jailed in Izmir (Smyrna) Turkey – many other Christians facing intensifying persecution – pray for them!

2:12-29 – Pergamum & Thyatira

Pergamum

(12-13a) Greeting

- Jesus' description of himself:
 - o Literally: "The one with the sword, the sharp one, the two-edged one."
 - o This sounds a bit ominous.

- Jesus' description of Pergamum: Where Satan has his throne
 - o Pergamum was a major center of worship for various gods. For example:
 - Asclepius: god of medicine/healing, symbolized by a serpent
 - Dionysus/Bacchus: god of wine, worshipped with drunken orgies
 - Athena/Minerva: goddess of crafts & warfare
 - Zeus/Jupiter/Jove: King of the gods, father of Athena, wielder of lightning bolts, huge altar in Pergamum
 - Temples to various Roman Emperors worshipped as gods
 - Also, smaller temples to Demeter/Ceres goddess of the harvest and Hera/Juno: queen of the gods, sister and wife of Zeus, goddess of women and marriage
 - o Satan's throne could refer to a specific major temple (Asclepius? Zeus?) or to the enthusiastic, pervading paganism in the city that makes Satan feel "at home" there... maybe even to the extent that he made it his "headquarters" on earth!

(13b-15) Evaluation

- Positive (13) – They continue to be followers of Jesus in difficult circumstances (a place where Satan is very active).
 - o One of them, Antipas, was executed for his faith.
 - o This danger has not scared away the remaining members of the church. Their faith in Jesus is more important to them than their physical life.

- Negative (14-15) – Some of them compromised in their beliefs and practice.
 - o The "teachings of Balaam" (full story found in the book of Numbers): After he failed to curse Israel ([chapters 22-24](#)), Israel fell into sexual immorality and idolatry resulting in the death of 24,000 ([25:1-9](#)), which was Balaam's plan to destroy them ([31:15-16](#)).
 - Apparently, some of the Christians in Pergamum are participating in the worship rituals of false gods.
 - They still identified as Christians and worshipped the One True God, but they have also adopted some of the sinful practices of their society.
 - We don't know how they chose to justify it (Christian liberty? Witnessing opportunities? Avoiding persecution?), but we know that Jesus is displeased.
 - When the Bible calls something sin, it is a sin regardless of how acceptable it is in society.

- The “teachings of the Nicolaitans” was some sort of false teaching that identified itself as compatible with Christianity.
 - It was already mentioned (v. 6) as something that Jesus hates.
 - Some of these Christians do not have the kind of spiritual discernment that the Ephesians had.
- Basically, they would die for their faith, but they do not consistently live it day-to-day.

(16) Application

- They need to repent.
 - *Repent*: turn away from sin (not just feel ashamed, say “I’m sorry,” and keep doing it).
 - When God calls something sins, it is a sin regardless of how acceptable it is in society.
 - For the Christians at Pergamum, compromise took the form of participating in idolatrous rituals & sexual immorality.
 - For 21st century American Christians:
 - sexual immorality: participation or at least approval ([Matthew 19:4-6](#), [Hebrews 13:4](#))
 - Speech that is obscene, insulting, degrading, and/or bitter ([Ephesians 4:29-32](#))
 - Alcohol or drug abuse ([Ephesians 5:18](#), [1 Corinthians 6:12](#))
 - Greed and hedonism: forms of idolatry that place the highest priority on acquiring money, possessions, physical pleasure, and/or leisure ([Matthew 6:24](#))
- If they don’t repent, Jesus will act against them.
 - They are acting contrary to his Word (the sword).
 - Sin brings negative consequences both personally and in the effectiveness of a church.

(17) Promise

- Hidden manna: being spiritually sustained and/or actual manna as one delight of heaven
- A white stone with a new secret name:
 - White stones were used in a variety of positive social situations (e.g. to declare someone innocent, to invite someone to a special event).
 - New secret name: a name that is used just between you and someone else (your spouse, your children, etc.) is a sign of love and intimacy.
 - Main point: you have a loving personal relationship with Jesus.

Thyatira

(18) Greeting

- A little background on Thyatira:
 - It was known for its well-organized commercial guilds (a little like unions) for carpenters, tent-makers, bakers, bronze smiths, wool workers, potters, linen weavers, tanners, slave traders, dyers of purple (like Lydia who was from Thyatira), etc.
 - Membership in these guilds required that you worship a certain patron god.

- Jesus' description of himself: eyes like flame and feet like shining bronze
 - o Shining emphasizes Jesus' glory.
 - o Burning eyes emphasizes his omniscience (that he sees/knows all things).

(19-20) Evaluation

- Positive (19)
 - o They are doing an excellent job at showing love, faith, and patience which is overflowing in service and good deeds.
 - o They are doing even better in these things than when they were first saved (unlike the Ephesians who have remained doctrinally pure but let love slip into the background).

- Negative (20)
 - o Many are listening to someone who claims to be a prophetess and is teaching the church that a compromised, ungodly lifestyle is acceptable.
 - *Jezebel* may be her real name, but more likely it is a "nickname" connecting her to the wicked queen who led Israel into sin (like how *Benedict Arnold* = traitor).
 - This is a step beyond Pergamum.
 - In Pergamum, many people in the church were unrepentantly participating in idolatry, immorality, and believing false doctrine.
 - In Thyatira, these things are openly taught as acceptable practice!
 - o They may be doing a lot of good thing out of love, but their public message and testimony is deeply compromised.
 - It is an understandable compromise because it would make their lives easier; it would give them access to the powerful commercial guilds.
 - God hates it nonetheless (*adultery* is probably used both literally and to refer to spiritual unfaithfulness – see [James 4:4](#)).

(21-25) Application

- (21-23) "Jezebel" and those following in her ways will be severely punished.
 - o She is so deeply compromised and destructive that she has "run out of time" to repent (original verb tense suggests this punishment is already in progress).
 - o Those who follow in her ways must quickly repent or face the same severe discipline.
 - o God is aware of all sin and enforces its consequences if there is not repentance.
 - See [I Corinthians 11:31-32](#) for another example of God severely punishing unrepentant sin that compromised a church's message.
 - Sometimes He uses severe discipline to keep the church's witness pure.

- (24-25) Those who are not participating in her sins are urged to remain faithful.
 - o They have not given in to the idea that they are "missing out" on something good that can only be achieved through something sinful (literally the oldest lie in the book! – [Genesis 3:4-5](#)).
 - o They are encouraged to hold on because Jesus is returning.

- This is extremely important encouragement for the world that we live in.
 - There are plenty of Christians and churches in our society who actively teach that various ungodly actions and lifestyles are morally acceptable before God.
 - In the short-run this may give them more opportunity to do certain good deeds without interference, but such compromise is unacceptable to Jesus.
 - Hold on to faithful, godly living because Jesus is coming and his approval is what we should truly value.

[\(26-29\)](#) Promises

- In the other six letters, the closing promise is addressed simply to those who are victorious (all Christians), but this one is a little different.
 - It is for those who are victorious *and* faithful in doing God's will to the end.
 - i.e. All true Christians receive the blessings that come with salvation, but faithfulness in holy living is further rewarded.
 - This is emphasized to the godly Believers in this church because they are surrounded by so much unfaithfulness.

- This reward includes a position of authority in the Millennial Kingdom.
 - This statement is very much in line with the parable of the talents in [Luke 19:11-27](#).
 - The position involves both guidance (ruling = shepherding) and judgment (smashing).

- The morning star:
 - May refer to a close relationship with Jesus himself ([II Peter 1:19](#)).
 - May refer to further eternal rewards as in [Daniel 12:2-3](#) & [Matthew 13:43](#).

3:1-6 – Sardis

(1a) Greeting

- Sardis
 - The city no longer exists (just ruins).
 - It was famous for being conquered by a surprise attack...twice!
 - They trusted in the “unclimbable cliffs” protecting one side of the city.
 - In 549 BC, The Persians under Cyrus managed to find a route up the cliffs by watching a soldier climb down and back up to retrieve his helmet, and the Greeks did something similar about 330 year later.

- Jesus description of himself
 - Emphasis on the Holy Spirit is especially tied to Christ’s ability to judge righteously (see [Isaiah 11:1-5](#)).
 - The seven stars emphasizes the pastors’ responsibility to Jesus.

(1b-2, 4) Evaluation

- (1b-2) Negative
 - They have the reputation of being a church that is very much alive:
 - Maybe they have a large and growing congregation.
 - Maybe they have a lot of things going on (like a modern church with lots of programs and “social justice” projects).
 - In reality, they are dead.
 - These are not just Christians who have major problems. They are not truly saved at all ([Ephesians 2:1-5](#)).
 - As a result, everything that they do is lacking in God’s eyes ([Isaiah 64:6](#)). It is not done out of pure motives and does not point people to faith in Christ alone.
 - It is only when we are saved by grace through faith that we are able to do truly good works ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#)).

- (4) Positive: There are a few people in this church who are truly alive in Christ.
 - It is not which church you are associated with that saves you.
 - Some people are saved despite being in a church that does not faithfully preach the Gospel.
 - On the flipside, some people spend most of their lives in a church that *does* preach the Gospel and yet remain unsaved.
 - Throughout Revelation, white garments represent righteousness from God and personal acts done in His strength ([Revelation 19:8](#), [22:14](#)).

(3) Application

- They must turn back to what they had originally received: the true Gospel ([1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#)).
 - There are many corruptions of the Gospel that we must avoid believing or teaching ([Jude 3-4](#)). Some currently popular examples:

- Prosperity Gospel: If I trust God enough he gives me good stuff here and now.
 - This can be a misunderstanding of the Christian life for a saved person.
 - When it is the only thing that a person believes about their relationship with God (no repentance and forgiveness of sin), it is a full-blown false Gospel that reduces God to the cosmic vending machine.
 - Cosmic Balance: If you do more good than bad, you're okay
 - This is pure salvation by works.
 - It is the most obvious false Gospel because it has almost nothing to do with faith other than a vague belief that God exists.
 - Social Justice: the message of Jesus is primarily about helping the poor and vulnerable (hospitals, orphanages, wells, schools, etc.).
 - i.e. Acting in Christ-like love is far more important than what you believe about things like the death and resurrection of Jesus.
 - People who teach this tend to be "red letter Christians" who focus mostly on the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5-7](#)).
 - While "social justice" is incredibly important and often neglected, if it is believed to be the *only* point of the Gospel it becomes just a slightly subtler version of salvation by works.
 - Faith + Works: We are saved through Jesus' death plus doing certain things.
 - i.e. Faith in Jesus gets us on the right path (that we could never get on ourselves), and from there he helps us earn it through ceremonies, sacraments, and other good works.
 - The whole book of Galatians is written against this view of salvation (instead of the sacraments they wanted to add circumcision).
 - Any false Gospel condemns a person to hell ([Galatians 1:6-9](#)).
 - We cannot in any way support churches or pastors who teach a false Gospel ([II John 8-11](#)).
 - We cannot allow our own thinking to be swayed by a false Gospel.
 - E.g. living in fear of losing salvation
 - E.g. focusing all energy on social causes to the neglect of sharing the true Gospel
- Jesus warns this dead church that if they do not return to what they once had he will return and catch them unaware...just as their city was twice caught unaware.
 - This could refer to his intervening in a way that removes their church from the picture (as with Jesus' warning that he might remove the lampstand of Ephesus in [2:5](#)).
 - It could refer to them being unready and left behind when he returns to take his church to be with him.
 - There are probably elements of both.
 - Liberal mainline churches that have completely stopped preaching the true Gospel are closing faster than any other.
 - When the rapture occurs, there will be some churches that find most of their members left behind.

(4-6) Promises

- Dressed in white: already discussed above – the reward of true good works done by those in a right relationship with God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Never blotted out of the book of life speaks of the assurance of salvation
 - o The book of life contains the name of all saved people ([Revelation 21:27](#)).
 - o This is assurance that If your name is there, there is no way that it will ever be erased (stated in the strongest possible way in the original language), but Jesus will acknowledge you as his own...and what better reward can there be than that?

3:7-13 – Philadelphia

(7) Greeting

- Philadelphia
 - It was built by a Lydian king in honor of his brother (“city of brotherly love”).
 - It was destroyed multiple times by earthquakes but currently exists as Alasehir.

- Jesus’ description of himself:
 - It is a reminder of Jesus’ qualities of holiness, truth, and sovereignty.
 - All that he says and plans will come to pass because he is free from sin, always speaking the truth, and in ultimate control of all things.

(8) Evaluation

- Jesus has given them ministry opportunities that no one can take away even though they are not a very strong church.
 - We don’t know what made them weak: small membership? Persecution? Poverty?
 - Jesus was planning to work through them in spite of their weakness.
 - ...maybe even because of their weakness ([II Corinthians 12:9-10](#))!
 - It is ultimately up to God to bring about the results of our service to him.
 - Our obedience is the means by which he draws others to himself ([Acts 13:48](#), [16:14](#), [18:9-10](#)).

- The church in Philadelphia has not compromised in their actions or beliefs.
 - Such compromise *can* lead a church to be stronger in terms of attendance, acceptance, and finances.
 - A compromised lifestyle and message come with less conviction of sin and less responsibility to live holy lives.
 - This causes less offense and allows for more immediate gratification so more people are willing to be part of it.
 - Jesus has already condemned compromising churches in previous letters.
 - Because they have not compromised, they are strong where it matters: they have the strength of the Lord behind them and opportunities to do ministry of eternal value in front of them.

(9-10) Promises – Part 1

- While addressed to the Philadelphians, these promises have application to all Christians.

- The Jews who are opposing them will one day publicly acknowledge they were wrong.
 - God will eventually right all wrongs.
 - Justice is coming: the evil things said and done against God’s people by God’s enemies will not go unanswered. He himself will see that his followers are publicly vindicated.

- They will not have to go through the coming 7-year tribulation period (described in great detail throughout most of the rest of the book).
 - o This strongly implies that the rapture in which all Christians are taken to heaven ([I Thessalonians 4:15-18](#)) will take place *before* the tribulation.
 - o Three related lines of argument that support the pre-tribulation rapture:
 - Christians are destined to deliverance from God’s Wrath – [I Thessalonians 1:10](#), [5:9](#) where the context clearly includes “Day of the Lord” wrath (and the whole 7-year tribulation is God’s wrath poured out on the world).
 - Imminence – Throughout the New Testament the return of Christ for his people is spoken of as something that could occur at any moment (e.g. [Luke 12:40](#), [Philippians 3:20](#), [James 5:8-9](#)).
 - Argument from silence (a weaker, supporting argument) – There is no mention of the church in the chapters dealing with the tribulation. After the 7 letters, the church only shows up as the bride of Christ in the New Jerusalem (Chapter 21).

(11) Application

- Very basic: hold on to what you have (keep living & serving faithfully without compromise).
 - o Jesus expects us to take advantage of the “open doors” he gives us.
 - o Any opposition and suffering is temporary.
 - o Jesus has already saved us, and the day is coming when we will see him face to face and our salvation will be complete.
- Faithfulness brings eternal rewards.
 - o A lack of faithfulness can result in lost rewards ([I Corinthians 9:24-27](#)).
 - o Some people will be saved but have the realization that their life accomplished little of eternal value ([I Corinthians 3:11-15](#)).

(12-13) Promises – Part 2

- The one who is victorious will be a permanent pillar in the temple engraved with the names of the Father, the Son, and New Jerusalem.
 - o This is clearly symbolic/poetic.
 - o It is in contrast with the impermanent nature of buildings in earthquake-prone Philadelphia.
- The emphasis is on a permanent close relationship with God in his presence and perfectly reflecting his character (Maybe resorting to symbolism because it is beyond our comprehension?).

3:14-22 – Laodicea

Introduction

- This is usually the letter that gets emphasized the most because people who see the churches as symbolic of eras in church history see this as the age we live in. All commentators with this view conveniently think that it started 40-60 years before their time no matter when they wrote.
- Personally, I think you can find just as many examples of active-but-dead churches (Sardis), loving-but-compromised churches (Pergamum & Thyatira), and doctrinally-pure-but-unloving churches (Ephesus) in our world today.
- Nevertheless, the problem at Laodicea *is* a major one today (and throughout church history in general).

(14) Greeting

- Laodicea
 - o It was a wealthy commercial city.
 - When the city was destroyed by an earthquake, the citizens refused all imperial government help and rebuilt it with their own money.
 - Its two best-known products were black wool cloth and eye ointment.
 - o It was also known for an elaborate aqueduct and plumbing system that provided water from neighboring hot springs; water that was lukewarm by the time it got to Laodicea.
 - o By the time John wrote this letter, there was already a well-established church there (mentioned in [Colossians 2:1](#) & [4:16](#)).
- Jesus
 - o *Amen* (let it be so) and *faithful and true witness* contrast with Laodicea's poor witness.
 - o Jehovah's Witnesses like to use this verse as proof that Jesus is a created being.
 - The word translated *beginning* can also be translated *ruler*.
 - Jesus is the beginning of God's creation in that he is the person of the Trinity most actively involved in creating the universe (i.e. he began it – [John 1:1-3](#)).
 - Whether taken to mean *ruler* or *beginning*, the emphasis is on Jesus' greatness, sovereignty, and power. He is God, not a created god-like being.

(15-17) Evaluation

- Two possible understandings of hot and cold
 - o #1 – Hot = on fire for God & Cold = unsaved or living in rebellion (would Jesus really tell a saved person that he would prefer for them be unsaved or openly rebellious?!)
 - o #2 – Both hot and cold water are useful: cold is refreshing ([Matthew 10:42](#)) and hot is medicinal (i.e. Jesus wants them to be involved in some profitable way).
- Either way, their problem is that they are just coasting along with minimum effort.
 - o Jesus finds this as disgusting as taking a drink and unexpectedly finding it lukewarm.
 - The word translated *spit out* frequently includes the idea of vomiting.
 - Jesus is about to remove this church from the picture.

- Some examples of coasting in the Christian life:
 - Participation in church is limited to attending a service or two per week.
 - I avoid the most obviously destructive sins but don't go out of my way to do good (whether sharing the Gospel or giving physical assistance).
 - I spend little time with God: prayer is something to rush through before eating, and the Bible is something that I take to church.
 - I seldom feel convicted about sin, and if I do feel convicted I do little about it.
- They feel like they have everything they need but, they are in terrible condition
 - Wretched and pitiful:
 - They lack true peace and joy.
 - Their current good feelings are attached to temporary possessions and favorable circumstances that could be taken away or destroyed at any time.
 - They do not have the faith and renewed mind that will be necessary if all their "fun stuff" goes away ([Philippians 4:12-13](#)).
 - Poor:
 - They lack anything of eternal value other than their salvation.
 - They will be the ones who at the judgment seat of Christ who will watch their lives' accomplishments vanish in a puff of smoke ([I Corinthians 3:13-15](#)).
 - Blind:
 - They are unable to discern spiritual truth, making them easily led astray.
 - The teaching ministry of church leaders is one of God's ways of helping people develop spiritual maturity ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#)).
 - Naked:
 - They are lacking spiritual clothing.
 - For a Christian to seldom do good is as shameful as running around naked.
- Basically, this church has adopted a materialistic world view.
 - They find their purpose, happiness, and highest priority in acquiring and maintaining wealth, possessions, and security.
 - They are trying to "serve two masters" ([Matthew 6:24](#)), and Jesus has been demoted to "fire insurance."

(18-20) Application

- **(18)** Stop living for financial security and focus on Jesus' spiritual gold, clothing, and clear vision.
 - ...as opposed to the black wool & eye ointment that were Laodicea's main export.
 - They need to start living in a way that stores "treasure in heaven" ([Matthew 6:19-21](#)).
- **(19)** Jesus warns that he rebukes and disciplines those who belong to him.
 - This shows us that he *is* talking primarily to believers in this church.
 - The word translated as *rebukes* can include the idea of physical punishment, and the word translated as *discipline* specifically refers to training a child.
 - i.e. If they don't correct their behavior, he cares enough about their future well-being that he will help them correct it, and it will not be pleasant.

- [\(20\)](#) Jesus is only in active, close fellowship with a person or church when they allow him to be.
 - o This verse is usually used as an invitation to salvation, but that is not its main application when taken in context.
 - o It refers to proper fellowship between a Believer and Jesus. You will not have a close relationship with God unless you deliberately make him a part of your everyday life.
 - o [Philippians 2:12-13](#) – Part of our responsibility is to cooperate with God’s work in our life so that we can more fully experience the benefits of our salvation.

[\(21-22\)](#) *Promise*

- We will reign with Jesus in his coming kingdom.
 - o As with most of the other promises, it is a reminder to not give up now because of what is coming.
 - o For the Laodiceans and those like them, it is also a reminder of how silly it is to focus on acquiring the temporary things of this world.

- Throughout the Bible, we see that our faithfulness now in some way determine our position and responsibilities within the Kingdom (e.g. [Luke 16:10-13](#)).
 - o Is the money (or whatever else) that God provides you a tool or your master?
 - o If you say it’s a tool but spend all your time trying to get a bigger and bigger “tool” so that you can use it to do good “later,” it just might have become your master.

4-5 – Worthy!

Praise in Heaven

Introduction

- We are now entering the third and longest section of the book from the outline found in [1:19](#).
 - o Things that you have seen: the vision of Jesus in chapter 1
 - o Things that are: the letters to the churches in chapters 2-3
 - o What will take place later: chapters 4-22

- [4:1](#) is the invitation to see the future.
 - o The voice is that of Jesus.
 - o The door in heaven reminds us that this world that we can see is only one part of reality.
 - o Jesus is going to share with John (and us) a preview of the events from the start of the tribulation through the establishment of the eternal kingdom.
 - o We can assume that the preview here starts after the rapture.
 - Jesus' promises to keep the church out of the tribulation ([Revelation 3:10](#)).
 - The church isn't mentioned in connection with any earthly event until [22:16-17](#).

[\(4\)](#) *The Throne Room of God*

[\(2-3, 5-6a\)](#) The One on the Throne

- [\(2\)](#) The throne demonstrates kingship/sovereignty.

- [\(3\)](#) The glow like sparkling stones displays brilliance/glory and color.
 - o The exact identity of the first and second stones is debated but everyone pretty much agrees "Jasper" is clear crystal ([21:11](#)), "carnelian/ ruby" is red, and emerald is green.
 - o Commentators offer many creative attempts to give symbolic significance to the stones.
 - e.g. Jasper and carnelian/ruby are the first and last stones on the high priest's breast plate so this is emphasizing God as the God of Israel.
 - The main point is of the overwhelming brilliance and beauty of God.

- [\(5a\)](#) Rumbles, peals of thunder, and lightning emphasize the terrifying majesty and power of God (like when he appears on Mt. Sinai – [Exodus 19:16ff](#)).

- [\(5b\)](#) Seven flaming lamps in front of the throne are the "sevenfold Spirit" of God ([Isaiah 11:2](#)).

- [\(6a\)](#) The sea of glass would reflect the glory of the scene (many creative symbolic interpretations are offered with little Scriptural support for any of them).

- Which person of the Trinity is this? The Father
 - o It is clearly not the Spirit (He is represented in the lamps) or the Son (the Lamb appears in the next chapter).
 - o But note that both the Father and the Son sit on the throne of God ([3:21](#)).

[\(4, 6b-8\)](#) The Worshippers Around the Throne

- [\(4\)](#) The twenty-four elders
 - o They are seating on thrones and thus have some sort of ruling authority under God.
 - o Their description of white robes and gold victory crowns probably indicates saved humans rather than angelic beings (see 2:10 for crowns & 3:4, 18 for white robes).
 - o They are probably special representatives of God's people.
 - Possibly 12 from the tribes of Israel & 12 from the church (e.g. the apostles)
 - Other suggestions have been made (e.g. all 24 from the church age).

- [\(6b-8a\)](#) The four living creatures
 - o A variety of creative symbolic meanings have been suggested (e.g. God's attributes, the four gospels, the 12 tribes of Israel).
 - o A much more likely, literal interpretation is that they are seraphim ([Isaiah 6:1-3](#)), cherubim ([Ezekiel 1:5-14](#)), or some similar order of angelic beings.

[\(8b-11\)](#) The Worship Around the Throne

- Worship is expressing the greatness of God and your reaction to it.

- [\(8b\)](#) God is worshipped because of his character.
 - o He is holy – perfectly set apart from sin; all that he does is righteous.
 - o He is almighty – having power & authority to do as he wills and none can hinder him.
 - o He is eternal – There has never been and never will be a time when God did not exist.

- [\(9-11\)](#) God is worshipped as Creator.
 - o [\(10\)](#) The 24 elders cast their crowns (victory στεφανοι/*stephanoi* not kingly διαδεματα/*diademata*) at his feet, recognizing that anything they have is ultimately a gift of his grace.
 - o [\(11\)](#) How can it be otherwise since everything exists by his will and his creative work?

Why Describe This?

- It reminds us how great, awesome, and gracious God is so that we too will worship him “in spirit and in truth.”

- It explain why God is right in doing what he is about to do in judging the earth.
 - o #1 – He is holy so by definition everything he does with his almighty power is righteous.
 - o #2 – He is the Creator of the universe so it is his to do with as he pleases.

[\(5\)](#) The Scroll & the Lamb

[\(1-4\)](#) The Scroll

- It is held closed by seven seals that must be broken for the scroll to be unrolled.

- It contains the events that are about to happen, ending with the establishment of the eternal Kingdom of God.

- A mighty angel makes a proclamation asking who is worthy to open and read it.
 - o Only one who has the authority to cause the things written in the scroll to come about can do so.
 - o A seminary prof explained it as the “title deed to the universe.”
 - The one who opens it is the one worthy to establish the Kingdom of God.
 - Some Roman wills and inheritance papers were sealed with seven seals.
- John’s distress: if no one is worthy to open it and bring about justice and perfection, we are stuck with this broken, warped world.

(5-7) The Lion of Judah

- (5) The victorious Lion of Judah will open the scroll!
 - o Both titles used here emphasize ultimate kingship.
 - “Lion of Judah” is from [Genesis 49:9-10](#).
 - “Root of David” is from [Isaiah 11:1-2](#)ff (Jesse is David’s father).
 - o He has authority to open the scroll by right of conquest.
- (6) The Lion is the Lamb that was slain.
 - o He possesses (and sends out) the sevenfold Spirit of God.
 - o His conquest was through his death (and resurrection since he is clearly now alive).
- (7) He receives the scroll from the One on the throne.
 - o i.e. the Father gives the Son the authority to establish the Kingdom.
 - o Parallel passages: [Daniel 7:13-14](#), [Psalm 2:7-9](#)

(8-14) The Worship of the Lamb

- (8) He receives worship from the angels, the redeemed humans, and the prayers of the saints (aka He is God).
- (9-10) He has the authority to judge the wicked and establish God’s Kingdom not only because he is the holy, almighty Creator, but also because he is the Redeemer & Savior.
 - o A redeemer is someone who buys something or someone back.
 - o Not only did Jesus purchase our forgiveness and freedom with his blood, but he is going to share his rule over the Kingdom with us.
- (11-12) A vast number of angels join in and proclaim a sevenfold worthy (worthy = deserving).
 - o 10,000 X 10,000 = 100,000,000 (10,000 is the largest number for which Greek has a name so John is basically saying the biggest number he can easily express.)
 - o The point: Jesus Christ has the right to all things.
- (13-14) All of Creation joins in the worship of the Lamb.

Conclusion

- Our God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is awe-inspiring, deserving of all honor, and graciously redeemed us to rule with him forever.

- Jesus Christ has the supreme right to judge the earth and set up God's eternal kingdom.
 - o He has the right as the Holy and Almighty One.
 - o He has the right as the Creator of all.
 - o He has the right as Redeemer and Savior (who gives everyone an opportunity to be rescued from the coming judgment).

Daniel 2, 7, 8, 11 – The Five Kingdoms

Old Testament Prophetic Framework (Part 1)

Introduction

- Before we head into the chapters about the tribulation, it will be helpful to briefly look at the Old Testament book that gives us an overview of the time period and its purpose.
 - o Daniel is the main “apocalyptic” book of the Old Testament.
 - o i.e. It talks about future “end times” events using a lot of symbols that are then interpreted (often by angels).

- The five major apocalyptic visions are in chapters 2, 7, 8, 9, and 10-12.
 - o Dates:
 - Chapter 2 – 604BC
 - Chapter 7 – 553 BC
 - Chapter 8 – 551 BC
 - Chapter 9 – 539 BC
 - Chapters 10-12 – 537 BC
 - o Note: Chapters 7 & 8 (visions relating partly to Persia) come chronologically before chapter 5 (the account of Persia conquering Babylon in 539 BC).

- This is only going to be an overview.
 - o I’ll do a lot of summarizing, especially in the parts that deals with prophecy that has already been fulfilled.
 - o John is going to cover most of the same yet-to-be-fulfilled future events and fill in a lot of detail, but Daniel gives us a basic framework.

- This set of notes covers the five Kingdoms whose histories were prophesied by Daniel (Note: most dates are +/- a year or two).

Fulfilled Prophecy

#1 – (Neo-)Babylonian Empire

- King Nebuchadnezzar had (more-or-less) conquered Israel in 606 and carried off a number of Jews (including Daniel) to the capital city of Babylon ([1:1-3](#)).

- Daniel is living in the city of Babylon as he records these visions.

#2 – The (Achaemenid) Medo-Persian Empire

- It is also called the Empire/Kingdom of the Medes and Persians.

- Prophecy: The Babylonian Empire will fall to the Medo-Persian Empire ([2:39a](#), [7:5](#), [8:20](#)).
 - o This was fulfilled in 539 BC when Cyrus the Great captured Babylon.
 - o Chapter 5 describes the event (writing on the wall, etc.).

#3 – The (Macedonian) Greek Empire

- We start getting more detail as the predictions get farther away from Daniel's time (minimum 200 years)!
- Prophecy: The Persian Empire will fall to the Greeks ([2:39b](#), [7:6](#), [8:21a](#)).
 - o This was fulfilled in 331 BC under Alexander the Great.
 - o He conquered much of the known world in just 13 years.
- Prophecy: When Greece's leader dies, his empire will be divided into four kingdoms ([8:22](#)).
 - o This was fulfilled 323-301 BC as Alexander's generals killed his son and fought among themselves.
 - o By 301 BC, there were four Greek kingdoms under the surviving generals Antigonus, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.
- Prophecy: Two of these kingdoms will be constantly at war with each other ([11:2-30](#)).
 - o This was fulfilled 316-169 BC as the Seleucid Greek Empire in Syria/Persia fought the Ptolemaic Greek Empire in Egypt (the most famous Ptolemy was Cleopatra).
 - o Much of this conflict involved Israel and the surrounding land.
 - o These verses give a detailed account of various campaigns, plots, battles, etc. in this on-again-off-again war.
- Prophecy: The northernmost of these two kingdoms will produce a king who persecutes righteous Jews and desecrates the temple ([8:23-26](#), [11:31-35](#)).
 - o This was fulfilled in 169 BC by Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" who killed many Jews, outlawed the practice of their religion, and desecrated the temple (including by putting up an idol in it and sacrificing a pig on the altar).
 - o This led to the Maccabean revolt in which Israel gained its independence for about 100 years (Hanukah comes from this time).

#4 - The (Original) Roman Empire

- Prophecy: The (Macedonian) Greek Empire will fall to an unnamed brutal empire ([2:40](#), [7:7](#)).
 - o This was fulfilled in 146 BC when the Roman Empire broke the power of Greece at the battle of Corinth (The Greek kingdoms were fully absorbed over the next ~110 years).
 - o Israel was taken over by Rome in 68 BC.
- Prophecy: The armies of this kingdom (Rome) will destroy Jerusalem ([9:26](#)).
 - o This was fulfilled in 70 AD when Israel revolted against Rome and were crushed.
 - o Though Jerusalem has been rebuilt, the temple never has.

Future Events

#4.5 – The Revived Roman Empire

- It will be weaker and less united ([2:41-43](#)).
 - o It will probably be more of a confederacy than a true empire (similar to the EU).
 - o It will have a geographic and/or cultural connection to the original Roman Empire.

- It will be made up of 10 kingdoms, 3 of which will be subdued/destroyed ([7:23-24](#)).
- It will be dominated by a wicked king who will blaspheme God, persecute God's people, and interfere with proper worship for 3½ years ([7:8](#), [25](#)).
 - o Time (1) + Times (2) + half a time (½) = 3½
 - o This is the one we usually call the Antichrist, and Daniel has more to say about him and his actions as we will see in the next section.

#5 – God's Eternal Kingdom

- God will judge these kingdoms and establish his own eternal kingdom ([2:44-45](#), [7:9-10](#), [26-27](#)).
 - o We saw his right to do so in Revelation 4-5.
 - o Revelation is going to fill in a lot of the detail for this.
 - o Revived Rome and its leader will receive the harshest punishment ([7:11-12](#)).
- This kingdom will be ruled by "One like the Son of Man" ([7:13-14](#)).
 - o *Son of Man* is Jesus' most frequent name for himself in his teachings (e.g. [Mark 14:62](#)).
 - o The Son of Man receiving the right to rule from the Ancient of Days who is seated on the flaming judgment throne is basically the same scene as Revelation 5 with the Lamb receiving the sealed scroll from the One seated on the throne.
- This kingdom that fills the whole earth ([2:35](#)) will be the home and possession of God's people forever ([7:27](#)).

Conclusion

- These passages show God accurately revealing 600+ years of history before it happens (minimum time between an initial prediction and its fulfillment is 65 years!).
- It should give us confidence...
 - o ...in the truth of God's Word.
 - o ...in the vastness of his knowledge and power.
 - o ...in his ability and faithfulness in caring for us.
 - As his people who will inherit the coming kingdom
 - As individuals with whom he has a relationship
 - He is not just a passive observer with a lot of information, but the One who actively brings about His will in the world and in our lives ([Ephesians 1:11-14](#)).

Daniel 9, 11, 12 – The Seventy ‘Sevens’

Old Testament Prophetic Framework (Part 2)

Introduction

- This week we look at the 490 years of history that God has laid out in advance for his people Israel and the city of Jerusalem.
- Why study this?
 - o God included it in the Bible and everything in the Bible is profitable ([II Timothy 3:16-17](#)).
 - Not everything is profitable in the same way.
 - Sometimes there isn't a direct “do this” kind of application, but more of a “know this” that helps us to love, trust, and praise God more.
 - Loving God with all your mind includes knowing as much as you can about him.
 - o While the focus is on God's plan for Israel and Jerusalem, its effects are universal.

(9:24) The Nature and Purpose of the 70 “Sevens”

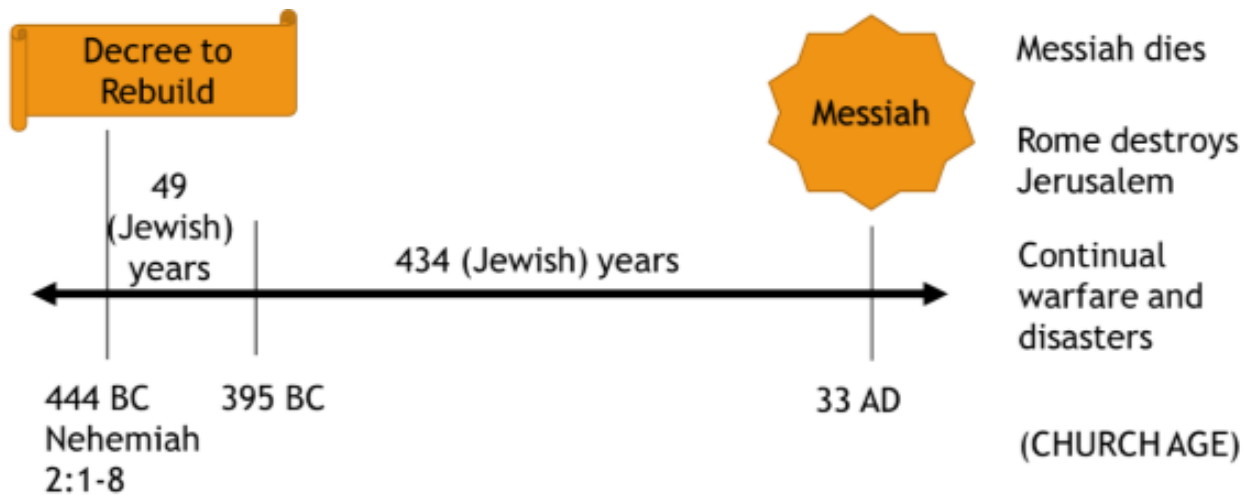
- The major events covered in this section are measured using seventy groups of seven years.
 - o The KJV/NKJV translators translated the word that literally means “sevens” as “weeks” (which is how it is often translated in other passages) so traditionally this is called “the 70 weeks of Daniel.”
 - o The most emphasis and detail is given to the 70th group of 7 years (which we often refer to as the tribulation, though the Bible never specifically calls it by that name).
 - o Note: A standard year in the Jewish calendar has 360 days.
- The purpose for the events recorded here is clearly stated.
 - o To finish transgressions and put an end to sin – This will remove sin from the universe forever.
 - o To atone for wickedness – For sin to be removed the penalty of it must be paid for in some way.
 - o To bring in everlasting righteousness – This is connected with the perfect kingdom of God already prophesied in previous chapters.
 - o To seal up vision and prophecy – This will fulfill all existing prophecies and bring an end to the need for any more ([I Corinthians 13:8-12](#)).
 - o To anoint the most holy (literally: holy of holies)– It will establish the dwelling place of God on earth.

(9:25-27) Overview of the Seventy “Sevens”

- **(25)** From the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One/Messiah/Christ will be 7 sevens (49 years) plus 62 sevens (434 years).
 - o The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was issued King Artaxerxes in 444 BC ([Nehemiah 2:1-8](#)).
 - o Forty-nine years later (48.25 of our years) may be the date at which the construction of Jerusalem was complete.
 - o 434 years later (427.75 of our years) was Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
 - o Note: there are a couple other ways to calculate this if you start with a different decree (e.g. [Ezra 7:11-26](#)) and/or use our 365.25-day solar year.

- No matter how you calculate it, you end up with the end date falling during the life of Jesus.
 - Even if the people of Jesus' day weren't quite sure of the exact year, they should have known when they were getting close.
- (26) Important events happen after the 69th (7+62) seven, but before the start of the 70th seven.
- Messiah will die. His death is described with a phrase that can be translated either as dying alone/forsaken/with nothing or dying on behalf of someone else (clearly Jesus).
 - The people whose empire will be ruled by "the king who is to come" (Antichrist) will destroy Jerusalem (the Romans did so in AD 70).
 - There will be continual warfare and disasters (just read history and watch the news).

Chart: The 70 Sevens



- (27) The 70th seven starts when "the king who is to come" brokers a seven-year peace treaty.
- No mention of how long of a gap is between the 69th seven and the 70th seven.
 - That is where we are living right now.
 - It is not included in this prophecy, because this prophecy is about Israel and Jerusalem.
 - The church is not mentioned in the Old Testament (though there are passages that speak of Gentiles being saved) – see [Ephesians 3:4-6](#).
 - This is also further evidence for the rapture taking place before the tribulation: the tribulation is about Israel, not the church.
 - The peace treaty only lasts for 3½ years before Antichrist breaks it by forbidding Jewish worship and desecrating the temple by setting up something blasphemous.
 - In the end, he will be destroyed.

More Information on the "King Who Is to Come" & the 70th Week

- [11:36-39](#) – His actions/character after breaking the treaty:
- He will forsake the religion in which he was raised and reject the idea of a Messiah (the one desired by women).
 - He will claim to be the Most High God.

- He will be empowered by false gods (probably reference to Satanic/demonic forces).
 - He will wield enormous military and political power.
 - He will be allowed (by God) to do this for a time.
- [11:41-45](#) gives some details of his final military campaign and defeat.
- We won't go into detail here because this is just an overview.
 - He is destroyed while camped "in the beautiful land....between the seas" (i.e. in Israel).
- [12:1-3](#) – despite the intense suffering, many will be saved.
- The destruction of Antichrist is very shortly followed by the resurrection of the dead.
 - The righteous will receive eternal rewards (shining like stars) and the wicked eternal punishment.
- [12:11-12](#) – One final prophecy about timing:
- This is a much-debated passage – here is how I understand it (other possible explanations exist):
 - 3 ½ years = 1260 days (a number that appears in Revelation in reference to the length of the Great Tribulation which ends with the destruction of Antichrist).
 - 1290 days is the time from the abomination of desolation until something (the thirty additional days are probably the time between Antichrist's destruction and the resurrection and judgments).
 - 1335 days is when only the blessed are left.
 - The 45 Additional days are probably time between the resurrection and the full establishment of the kingdom.
 - This addition time is probably for completing the various judgments and restoring the earth to near-perfect conditions.

Chart: Timing of Establishment of the Kingdom ([Daniel 12:11-12](#))



Applications

- God is in charge of history – If he can use the most wicked Satan-empowered man ever to accomplish his will, we can trust that he knows what he is doing when bad things happen in our lives.

- We should always be aware of the seriousness of sin and the depth of God's love.
 - The worst time in human history is what happens when sin is given free reign and God unleashes his wrath upon it.
 - Jesus suffered that same wrath to save us from it because he loves us.

6 – The Wrath of God Unleashed

The First Six Seal Judgments

Introduction

- Remember, the church is not present on earth during any of the following chapters.
 - o Jesus “saves us from the coming wrath” ([I Thessalonians 1:10](#), [5:9](#), [Revelation 3:10](#)).
 - o A guess at the number of saved people who will be raptured if the rapture were to happen today: 300 million
 - That is about 4.2% of world population or 1 in 24 people.
 - This is the approximate number of self-identified born-again/evangelical Christians and assumes that some of them are not actually saved and some people from other denominational backgrounds are.
- Chapters 6-19 detail three sets of seven judgments each (seals, trumpets, bowls).
 - o Recapitulation view: These are just three different ways of describing the same set of seven judgments.
 - Problem: A natural reading of the text shows them to follow one another. This is especially clear in [8:5-6](#) (the transition from seals to trumpets).
 - Some people who hold this view do so because it lets them shuffle the book around to fit in with their pet theories.
 - o Simple sequence view: Each set of judgments follows the one before it.
 - o Telescoping view: The 7th seal contains/is the 7 trumpets and the 7th trumpet contains/is the 7 bowls.
 - This is a little more complicated, but the language certainly allows for it.
 - It ties everything back to the scroll (title deed of the universe) of Chapter 5.

First 6 Seal Judgments

[\(1-2\)](#) Seal #1 – A Rider on a White Horse with a Bow and Victory (*Stephanos*) Crown

- Significance: a victorious general
 - o White was often the color of a horse in a victory procession.
 - o Some identify this as Jesus, but Jesus does not arrive on a white horse until the *end* of the tribulation, wearing kingly crowns (*diademata*) and wielding a sword ([19:11-21](#)).
- Identity: The prince that is to come ([Daniel 9:26](#)), the Beast from the sea ([Revelation 13](#)), the man of sin ([II Thessalonians 2:1](#)), the son of perdition ([II Thessalonians 2:3](#)) – aka *The Antichrist*
 - o His peace treaty with Israel kicks off the 7-year period ([Daniel 9:26-27](#)).
 - o He establishes himself as ruler of the revived Roman Empire (more on him chapter 13).

[\(3-4\)](#) Seal #2 – A Rider on a Red Horse with a Sword

- Significance: war
 - o Red is the color of bloodshed
 - o Possibly “World War III”

- Antichrist's expanding empire ("a conqueror bent on conquest" – v. [2](#)) leads to warfare on a massive scale.
 - o Antichrist is not the completely unopposed leader of the world; there is sporadic warfare throughout the seven years.
 - o Various major battles are mentioned in the Old Testament (most notably Gog and Magog in [Ezekiel 38-39](#)), but we do not seem to have enough information to put together an exact sequence.

- The US does not seem to have any distinct role in Revelation so it may be that it is either seriously weakened and ceases to be a world power or is absorbed into Antichrist's Empire during these wars.

[\(5-6\)](#) Seal #3 – A Rider with Merchant's Scales on a Black Horse

- Significance: famine
 - o The prices given for wheat and barley are 8-10 times above normal.
 - o It takes a day's wages to buy enough food for one or two people if you buy the cheap stuff. Luxury items are still available to those who can afford them.

- Famine frequently follows warfare due to lack of farmers, destruction of crops, etc.

[\(7-8\)](#) Seal #4 – A Rider on a Pale Green Horse

- Significance: death and hades
 - o The end result of warfare, famine, disease, and wild animals is mass death.
 - o Death: the cessation of physical life / separation of body and soul
 - o Hades: place of spiritual imprisonment and punishment after death (see [Luke 16:19-31](#))

- One quarter of the earth's remaining population is wiped out in these four judgments.
 - o At current earth's population that is over 1.7 billion people (*at least* 20X the estimated deaths caused by WWII when using a high estimate for WWII deaths).
 - o And this is with primarily using human tools (the rise of Antichrist and his empire) – once God starts intervening more directly it gets worse.

[\(9-11\)](#) Seal #5 – Souls of Martyrs Cry Out for God to Avenge their Deaths

- This is probably those saved after the rapture and martyred during this first part of the tribulation, since church age martyrs have already been raised at the rapture ([I Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)).

- In the Old Testament, the blood of sacrifices was poured out at the foot of the altar (e.g. [Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30](#)). These are people who gave up their lives to God.

- Why is it okay for them to call for vengeance?
 - o This is not out of spite, but so that God would show himself to be righteous and bring in the eternal kingdom of righteousness ([Psalm 74:9-10, 94:3-4](#)).
 - o This is almost more of an "are we there yet?" than anything.

- White robes are usually a reminder of righteous acts. (Being able to wear robes may also imply some sort of physical self between death and resurrection.)
- The time is coming, but not here yet...and some more bad things must happen before it arrives.

[\(12-14\)](#) Seal #6 – Earthquake and Cosmic Disturbances

- The whole natural order is disturbed: massive worldwide earthquake, sun darkened, moon reddened, heavenly bodies out of location, objects (meteors?) falling from the sky.
 - o The sky rolled back like a scroll may imply that those on earth can see into the throne room of God where the Lamb sits in judgment.
 - o Some of the cosmic disturbances seem to be somewhat temporary since further judgments also involve the sun, moon, and stars.
 - o All that hoopla over the “blood moons” last year was nonsense. The Bible only prophesies the moon becoming like blood in the context of the events of the tribulation.
- The reaction of everyone on earth is terror and defiance.
 - o They now recognize the source of these catastrophes as the wrath of God.
 - Some people try to say this *is* the first judgment that is the wrath of God and that it occurs at about the mid-point of the tribulation.
 - From this, they draw the conclusion that the rapture does not occur until about halfway through the tribulation.
 - They think we must suffer through all or most of the first 3½ years because they are “just the wrath of *man*,” and we are only promised protection from the wrath of *God*.
 - While the *instrument* of much (not all) of the first five judgments is human, the *source* of the judgment is still God’s wrath.
 - The Lamb (God the Son) opening the seals is what strikes the earth with these catastrophes.
 - God frequently uses human agents as his means of wrath and judgment (e.g. the Assyrians & Babylonians conquering Israel).
 - o People would rather seek death than repent.
 - o The chapter ends with the question “Who is able to stand?” which is answered in chapter 7.

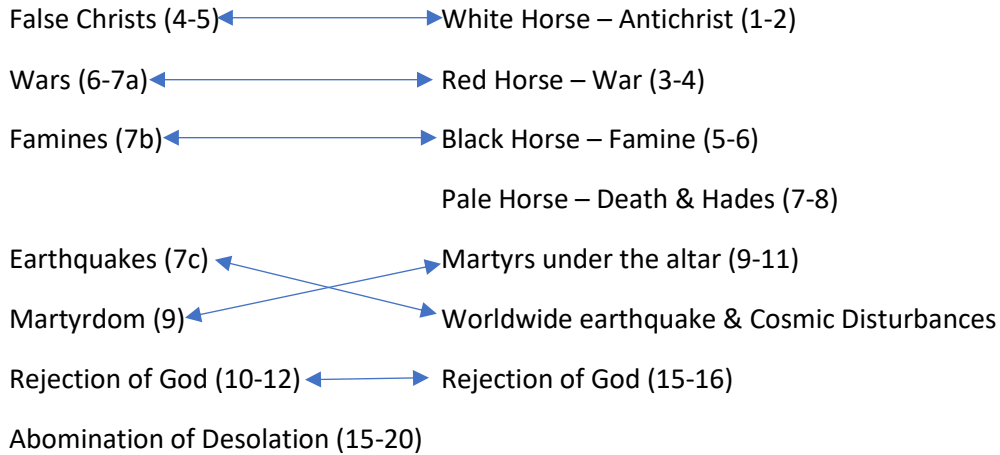
Timing of the judgments

- When you compare [Matthew 24](#) to [Revelation 6](#), the sequence of events matches up very well.
 - o i.e. Jesus is probably talking about the same events but with less detail.
 - o Perhaps these kinds of things will begin to happen more frequently as the end draws near (some would say we are experiencing this right now) and reach their peak at the seal judgments.

Chart: Comparison of Matthew 24 & Revelation 6

Matthew 24

Revelation 6



- In [Matthew 24](#), these things happen before the “abomination of desolation” (vv. [15-20](#)) and the Great Tribulation (vv. [21-22](#)), which probably places the seals somewhere in the first 3½ years of the tribulation (after a brief period of relative “peace”).

Applications

- God is holy.
 - o He hates sin and one day *will* do away with it forever, bringing about perfect justice.
 - o Don’t become discouraged when you see evil prospering. God will set all things right once this time of grace and patience ends.
 - o Don’t brush off “pet sins” as “no big deal.” God is Holy and we should be too.
- The tribulation will be terrible (and we’ve only seen some events from the first, milder half).
 - o When God unleashes his wrath against sin, it is terrifying.
 - o Praise God that Jesus saves us from the coming wrath (tribulational and eternal).
 - o Share the Gospel when you have opportunity; the way of escape from the tribulation is still open.
- Much like the martyred saints, we should look forward to the coming of Christ and end of this world with anticipation rather than dread ([II Peter 3:11-14](#)).
 - o The end of this world means the start of the perfect world.
 - o In preparation for that day we should be working to become more and more like Christ ([I John 3:2-3](#)).

7 – Who Is Able To stand?

The 144,000 & the Great Multitude

Introduction

- The question “Who is able to stand?” that ends chapter 6 is answered in the chapter 7.
- This is the first of several breaks from the sequence of 21 judgments.
 - o It is difficult to determine the exact order/timing of some of these events.
 - The order of the judgments is spelled out, certain things definitely happen at the 3½-year point, and other things clearly happen at the very end of the 7 years.
 - However, a lot of the rest of it is “educated guesses” – worth discussing, but “not a hill to die on.”
 - o For these events, it is more important for us to understand *what* is happening than it is to try to pigeonhole exactly *when* it happens within the 7 years.

(1-8) The 144,000

- Some people take a non-literal approach to this group.
 - o E.g. they are...a special “ruling class” of Christians, the church, all saved people, etc.
 - o These interpretations ignore pretty much everything that is said about these people in context; the amount of detail provided argues against non-literal symbolic interpretation.
- (1-3) These are people especially chosen and marked for God’s service before the judgements on plants and the sea (which start in chapter 8).
 - o i.e. These are saved people with a special task from God. The seal shows his ownership (and probably protection from the oncoming judgments).
 - o This is much like God preserving a remnant from judgment at the times of the flood (Noah), the Exodus (Passover), the conquest of Jericho (Rahab and her family), etc.
 - o These people were apparently saved after the rapture, because at the rapture all Christians are taken to heaven ([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)).
- (4-8) These are all Israelites – 12,000 from each of 12 tribes
 - o *Israel* refers to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
 - o The tribes of Israel are the descendants of 11 of Jacob’s sons plus Joseph’s two sons (Ephraim & Manasseh – in this list the tribe of Ephraim is referred to as *Joseph*).
 - That way Joseph gets double inheritance.
 - That means there are actually 13 tribes in the “12 tribes of Israel.”
 - Jewish people today seldom know what tribe they are from, but God knows.
 - o There are not 12,000 from the tribe of Dan. Apparently something leads to Dan not having a Christian testimony at this time in history.
 - Possibility #1 – Antichrist might be from the tribe of Dan (cf. [Genesis 49:17-18](#)).
 - Possibility #2 – Dan was the first tribe to give up on conquering their land and completely forsake God ([Judges 18](#)), bringing upon themselves the curse of [Deuteronomy 29:18-21](#).

- Possibility #3 – we just don't know.
- Whatever the case, Dan is not permanently cast off ([Ezekiel 48:2](#)).
- This can serve as a serious reminder that a person or group can lose their ability to effectively witness.
- The exact ministry of these 144,000 Jewish believers is not directly stated, but they are most likely witnesses/evangelists who spread the Gospel throughout the earth.

(9-17) The Great Multitude

- (9-12) Their description:
 - There are so many that they are uncountable (and John has previously used the number “ten thousand times ten thousand” to describe the number of angels).
 - They are from every nation/people-group on earth.
 - They are before the throne of the lamb (i.e. in heaven).
 - Their garments proclaim purity (white robes) and victory (palm branches).
 - They join in the worship of heaven.
- (13-14) Their identity:
 - (13) John is prompted to ask who they are.
 - (14) They are those who were saved (and presumably killed since they are in heaven) during the Great Tribulation (the last 3.5 years).
 - They were probably saved due to the witness of the 144,000.
 - Remember, at the 5th seal the martyrs were told to “wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed” ([6:11](#)).
- Common objections based on [II Thessalonians 2](#):
 - But how can anybody get saved if the Holy Spirit is taken out of the world? (vv. [6-7](#))
 - The Holy Spirit's restraining influence on evil is taken away as is his baptizing and indwelling ministry (since those belong to the church), but that does not necessarily mean that he is completely absent.
 - In the Old Testament, people were saved without the same kind of indwelling work that we have experienced since Pentecost.
 - It appears that the ministry of the Holy Spirit to individuals will more closely resemble his work in the Old Testament than his work in our own era.
 - But what about the verses that say if you reject the Gospel before the rapture you cannot be saved after the rapture? (vv. [9-12](#))
 - The “point of no return” is nowhere stated to be the rapture (The rapture isn't mentioned at all in this context. It is over in [I Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)).
 - The point at which God causes them to believe “strong delusions” so that they remain unsaved and face condemnation is after the “lawless one” (Antichrist) begins his displays of Satanic power.
 - Antichrist starts doing this at the mid-point of the tribulation.
 - [Revelation 14:9-11](#) clearly indicates that the “point of no return” is worshipping the beast (Antichrist) and taking his mark.

- A “face value” reading of Revelation 7 makes it very clear that the 144,000 Jews and an innumerable multitude from every nation are saved during this time!
- [\(15-17\)](#) A poem/song about the results of trusting Christ:
 - They have a special position of joyful service and close relationship with God Himself.
 - They will never again face hardships of any kind (hunger, thirst, exposure).
 - Jesus Christ Himself will personally care for them and provide everything they need forever, including complete freedom from sadness of any kind.
 - These are virtually the same promises given to all Christians of the church age (*cf.* Chapters 2, 3, 21).

Conclusion

- Who can stand in the day of God’s wrath?
 - Those who are sealed by God for his service
 - Those who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb”
- Even this time of God’s wrath is still characterized by God’s grace and mercy; the narrow way of escape is still open, though taking it will probably cost everything.
- Don’t give up sharing the Gospel.
 - The days we are living in aren’t half as bad as the tribulation, yet millions (maybe hundreds of millions) will be saved at that time.
 - God is always at work bringing people to himself, and he does so through our witness ([Romans 10:13-15](#)).
- Praise God that we have much in common with the tribulation saints.
 - We are all sealed (our seal is the Holy Spirit – [Ephesians 1:13-14](#)) and have a mission to share the Gospel.
 - We are washed clean by the blood of the lamb.
 - We are protected from God’s wrath (they are “able to stand” in the day of wrath and we are “kept from” it).
 - We look forward to a life where hardship and sadness are gone forever.

8-9 – The 7th Seal/6 Trumpets

Introduction

- As always, I interpret these as literally as possible unless something in the text specifically indicates or suggests that it is symbolic.
- The exact timing of these judgments is unclear.
 - o They almost certainly happen after the 3½ year point (i.e. during the Great Tribulation) – most commentators identify the 6th seal with the midpoint of the Tribulation.
 - o It is unclear how close together they happen.

(8:1-5) The Seventh Seal – Prelude

- (1) There is silence for half an hour.
 - o This shows the solemnity of what is about to take place.
 - o The book of Revelation is not an adventure story or a disaster movie – it is actual historical events that will happen to real people.
- (2) Seven angels prepare to blow trumpets that will unleash seven more judgments.
 - o These seven judgments appear to be the main content of the seventh seal.
 - o Likewise, the seven bowl judgments are the contents of the 7th trumpet.
- (3-6) The golden censer begins the judgments.
 - o The prayers of God's people are accompanied by the burning of fine incense.
 - In the OT the incense used in the tabernacle/temple was so special that no one was allowed to make or use it for any other purpose.
 - God is pleased by the prayers of his people and views them as precious.
 - o These are probably prayers for divine justice ([Revelation 6:9-11](#)).
 - o The time to answer those prayers for justice has now come. The fire is taken from the altar and hurled to the earth, unleashing an earthquake and the next 6 judgments.

(8:6-13) The First Four Trumpets – Plagues Against Nature

- (6-7) First Trumpet – hail, fire, and blood
 - o Blood could mean either blood falling with the hail or death and bloodshed of those caught out in it (similar to [Exodus 9:18-26](#)).
 - o This results in widespread destruction of plants through pummeling and burning.
 - It sounds like one result is raging wildfires.
 - All grass (including crops? If so, more famine!) and 1/3 of the trees are destroyed.
- (8-9) Second Trumpet – Destruction at Sea
 - o A huge flaming object (Volcanic? Meteor? Asteroid? Comet?) crashes into the ocean.
 - o One third of the ocean turns to blood (similar to [Exodus 7:14-24](#)).
 - o One third of ocean-dwelling animals die (they can't live in blood).
 - o One third of ships are destroyed (maybe from resulting tsunamis?).

- [\(10-11\)](#) Third Trumpet – “Wormwood”
 - o The plant wormwood is a bitter tasting herb that causes seizures and possibly hallucinations in large enough doses.
 - o A bright shooting star (Meteor? Comet?) called Wormwood blazes across the sky and contaminates 1/3 of the earth’s drinking water, killing people who drinks it.
- [\(12\)](#) Fourth Trumpet – Loss of light
 - o One third of the natural light from sun, moon, and stars is dimmed/obscured.
 - o Maybe in addition to the cosmic disturbances of the 6th seal or maybe those were temporary.
- Summary of the first four trumpets:
 - o As Creator, God is in complete control of nature ([Colossians 1:15-17](#)).
 - o He can use it to graciously bless ([Matthew 5:44-45](#)) or righteously judge.
 - o Praise God that he has provided us with blessings of light, water, and natural beauty.

[\(8:13-9:21\)](#) *The “Woes” – Judgments Against Mankind*

- An eagle (KJV follows a few recent manuscripts and says *angel*) declares that the next three judgments are going to be far worse, even though nature has just been devastated.
- We have much more detailed descriptions of the next two judgments.
 - o Some of the description is so bizarre that people either pass it all off as symbolism, or they assume that John saw and was trying to describe modern technology.
 - o There may be some truth in either of both of these explanations, but what they ignore is that a large part of what is happening in this chapter is clearly stated to be supernatural and demonic in nature, so we don’t need to try to explain it as purely natural events.

[\(1-11\)](#) Fifth Trumpet/First Woe – Demon Locusts

- The “star that had fallen from heaven” (KJV incorrectly translates as “falling”) is probably Satan.
 - o [Job 38:7](#) appears to refer to angels as stars.
 - o [Isaiah 14:12](#) appears to refer to Satan as *Day Star* or *Star of the morning* (KJV *Lucifer* is Latin for *Light Bearer* and is a far less accurate translation).
- The Abyss/bottomless pit is a place where some demons are imprisoned.
 - o [II Peter 2:4](#) mentions angels who are currently in “chains of darkness” in *Tartaros*.
 - o In [Luke 8:31](#) demons beg Jesus not to throw them into the Abyss yet.
 - o During the Millennium Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss (Revelation 20:1-3).
- [\(3-6\)](#) The actions of these “locusts”:
 - o [\(3\)](#) They cause burning pain like scorpions.
 - o [\(4\)](#) They will not hurt vegetation or those sealed by God (the 144,000 and probably all saints – [II Timothy 2:19](#) “...the Lord knows those who are his...”).
 - o [\(5\)](#) They physically torment people for 5 months.
 - o [\(6\)](#) The ones being tormented will be unable to die, which may suggest some degree of demon possession since they are not in full control of themselves.

- (7-10) Their appearance: Horse's body, victory crowns, human faces with long hair, teeth like iron, breastplates like iron, wings making the sound of galloping horses, stinging tails
 - o Many (starting with Hal Lindsey?) have suggested that these are helicopters.
 - The main reasons for this seems to be that helicopters look a little bit like grasshoppers, are made of iron, and their rotors (wings) make a loud thumping sound.
 - This interpretation is incredibly unlikely given that these "locusts" come out of the abyss (are the demons down there building attack choppers?).
 - Not to mention that this explanation really doesn't account for about half of the details (faces, hair, crowns, attack copters do not have tail-mounted guns as far as I know, nor do we have chemical/biological weapons that work as described).
 - o It seems much more likely that these are actual demonic beings.
 - They are either taking the physical shape described here (I incline to this view)...
 - ...or (since demons are naturally spirit beings) their appearance described here is primarily symbolic of the kinds of injuries they will inflict.
- Their organization:
 - o Their leader is called *Abbadon* (Hebrew) and *Apollyon* (Greek), both of which mean *Destroyer*.
 - o This is either another name for Satan or (since Satan has already been mentioned as the fallen star) some other high-ranking demon in charge of this particular group of demons.
- Summary of this judgment: Satan and his minions show their true colors.
 - o Satan is not a good old boy who just wants you to have a good time. Hell is not a place where Satan is the party king and you go and drink and shoot pool with your buddies.
 - o Satan and his followers want to harm and destroy everything that is dear to God. Don't let them fool you ([1 Peter 5:8](#)).
 - o Even at their worst, they still ultimately accomplish the will of God.

[\(9:12-21\)](#) Sixth Trumpet/Second Woe – Invading Army

- (13) The voice announcing this judgment comes from the altar – possibly in answer to the pleas of the saints for justice.
- (14-16) This judgment is the result of the actions of 4 fallen angels.
 - o (14) There is no reason to see Euphrates as anything other than the actual River Euphrates (flows through the Middle East – especially Iraq, Syria, and Turkey) – so this judgment probably comes from East of Israel.
 - o (15) God has the time of their release already established (down to the hour). He is not cobbling together his plan on the fly; he is not forced to react to human decisions.
 - o (16) These demons lead an army that wipes out 1/3 of the earth's remaining population.
 - The army is made up of 200,000,000 "horsemen."
 - Many commentators identify them with China as the only country that has the *population* and military prowess to field that size army.

- This could also be a confederation of Far Eastern and/or Arab nations.
 - China's current *official* military is nowhere near 200 million.
 - In fact, the current estimated total of active military, reserves, and paramilitary *in the whole world* is maybe 75 million.
 - Some have suggested the army is entirely demonic rather than human.
 - (17-19) The "horsemen" are either mounted on some sort of demonic monsters, or John is describing as best he can modern (or future) mechanized warfare.
 - e.g. fire, smoke and sulfur *might* be muzzle flashes, though this doesn't account for many of the other features.
 - This is one of those prophecies that will be a lot clearer when fulfilled.
- By this point the earth is devastated.
- More than half of the original population is gone, and the environment is in shambles.
 - Those who survive remain unrepentant.
 - Perhaps by this point everyone who is going to be saved has been saved.
 - They continue in murder, false religions (the word translated *sorceries* probably includes "mind-expanding" drug use), sexual immorality, theft, etc.
 - This makes the point that mankind is thoroughly depraved and deserving of judgment: even after graphically seeing how God feels about sin, they continue in it.

Conclusion

- Trumpets 1-4 – Don't forget to praise God for his daily blessings through nature (light, drinking water, beautiful plant life, etc.).
- Trumpet 5 – Don't forget that Satan is a destroyer – giving in to temptation is playing into the hands of God's enemy and yours.
- Trumpet 6 – Praise God that he has a plan for the ages and that it includes saving us from the judgment we deserve!

10 – The Angel & The Scroll

Introduction

- The next few chapters break from the series of judgments to cover other overlapping things.
 - o Some are tied to or part of the main series of judgments, and some are not.
 - o They include geo-political events on earth, messages and messengers from God, occurrences in heaven, and the build-up to the final purging of evil.
 - o The exact order and timing for some of these events is not completely clear.

- Chapter 10 is a message from heaven that probably follows immediately after the 6th seal judgment.

(1-4) The Angel's Description

- [\(1\)](#) He is wrapped in a cloud and crowned with a rainbow with a face like the sun and legs like columns of flame.
 - o He reflects God's glory as described elsewhere in the book (face like the sun – [1:16](#), glowing feet/legs – [1:15](#), rainbow halo – [4:3](#)) and acts as his messenger.
 - o The closer someone is to God, the more closely they resemble Him ([II Corinthians 3:18](#)).

- [\(2a\)](#) He is holding a little scroll (KJV – *book*).
 - o This is not the same as the scroll in chapter 5 (the sealed “title deed to the universe” that gives the Lamb the authority to establish the Eternal Kingdom).
 - o This one is open, not sealed, and has a different purpose (see below).

- [\(2b\)](#) He is standing right foot on the sea and left foot on land – showing God's control over all.

- [\(3a\)](#) He has a loud, powerful voice like a roaring lion.
 - o God's Word has authority and power ([Psalm 29:3-9](#)).
 - o We do not have to be ashamed or apologetic about the Word of God... what it says, it says with God's authority.

- [\(3b-4\)](#) His message is accompanied or followed by seven thundering voices.
 - o John is not permitted to reveal what these voices say.
 - o God tells us what we need to know but keeps some things secret.
 - He has told us everything we need to know to have a relationship with Him and live a life that is pleasing to Him ([Deuteronomy 29:29](#), [II Peter 1:3](#)).
 - We do not have a completely blind “leap-in-the-dark” faith, but we do live by faith – trusting what the Bible has told us about God and how we relate to him ([Hebrews 11:6](#)).

(5-7) The Angel's Message

- (5-6a) His message is confirmed with an oath in the name of God.
 - o When God has spoken something, it will come to pass.
 - o This includes a reminder of who God is: the eternal creator of all - if he created everything, he can certainly do what he wants with it.

- (6b-7) His message is that the Kingdom of God is about to arrive!
 - o In 6b, the KJV translation as "Time shall be no more" has given some people the idea that time does not exist in eternity.
 - As human beings, we are designed to live in time – one event follows another in sequence – an existence without time makes no sense.
 - The Greek word used for time (*χρονος/chronos*) refers to a period of time, not to the concept of time itself.
 - In this case, *time* is the time of delay before the establishment of the kingdom.
 - This phrase basically means "Time is up!" or "Time has run out!" (NIV "there will be no more delay").
 - o The sounding of the seventh trumpet indicates the accomplishment of God's plan.
 - i.e. The events unleashed by the seventh trumpet bring in the eternal kingdom of God ([Ephesians 1:9-10](#), [2:6-7](#))...endgame!
 - The events unleashed by the seventh trumpet are the seven bowl judgments culminating in the battle of Armageddon.

(8-11) The Little Scroll

- John eating the book/scroll that tastes sweet and makes his stomach bitter/upset appears to be a sort of object lesson or "enacted sermon."
 - o Some Old Testament prophets used similar imagery ([Ezekiel 3:1-9](#), [Jeremiah 15:15-18](#)).
 - o Eating the scroll represents taking in God's Word and making it part of you
 - o Sweetness reminds us of the delight that a Christian has in God's Word (e.g. [Psalm 19:9-11](#)) – we don't have to wonder what God expects of us or how he feels toward us
 - o Bitterness has a couple of possibilities (it's probably a bit of each).
 - Proclaiming and living God's Word can bring difficulties (John exiled on Patmos knows that firsthand).
 - God's Word does speak of wrath and judgment on those who do not believe. Though it is necessary, it is not a pleasant topic ([Ezekiel 33:11](#), [II Peter 3:9](#)).
 - There is a balance between excitement and joy that perfect righteousness has arrived and solemnity because of what that means for some of our fellow human beings.

- Instruction: John will proclaim God's Word throughout the world.
 - o As he indeed continues to do through this book!
 - o According to early church historians, he was active in the church until he died of old age.

Conclusion

- The passage brings to mind a lot of things about God's message and messengers.

- There are some things that God keeps secret, but he has told us what we need to know.
 - His Word speaks with absolute authority, so we should trust it and follow it without shame or apology.
 - The things that he has kept secret are things that he will take care of, and we can trust him to do so.

- We're not prophets like John, but we do have a responsibility of sharing God's Word.
 - We should be diligent in making it part of ourselves so that we better reflect him in actions and words to people who will experience the bitterness of judgment if they do not repent.
 - The time of perfect righteousness *is* coming, so let's do our best to help others be on the right side.

11:1-14 – The Two Witnesses

Introduction

- Before the 7th trumpet blows and ushers in the kingdom, we get a description of something that has been happening during some of the previous judgments: the ministry of the two witnesses.
- The timing of their ministry is a bit difficult to figure out.
 - o We are not told clearly where in the 7 years it falls, but there are a couple hints.
 - o Toward the end of this section, we'll look at two possible ways to see the timing.
- There is quite a bit of debate about their exact identity.
 - o Again, we are not told clearly, so speculation is relatively unimportant.
 - o I'll share a few different ideas that people have and a couple Scriptures that may tie into it, but that is not the primary focus of the passage.
- The main point is their actions and God's work through them. It is easy to get so caught in speculation about them that we miss what is actually revealed about them.

(1-2) The Measuring of the Temple

- Apparently the Jerusalem temple will be rebuilt at some time before the tribulation or in the early days of it.
 - o Various other passages ([Daniel 9:27](#), [12:11](#), [Matthew 24:15](#), [Mark 13:14](#)) speak of temple worship occurring and then being stopped by Antichrist at the 3½ year mark.
 - o There has not been a temple in Jerusalem since 70AD when the Romans destroyed it.
 - o There have been multiple attempts to rebuild the temple thwarted at various times by Samaritans, Romans, Byzantine "Christians," Muslims, and an earthquake.
 - o There are currently at least two obstacles to rebuilding:
 - The exact location where it should be built on the temple mount is unclear (Some modern religious Jews think it should be left up to the coming Messiah).
 - The Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque currently occupy much of the temple mount.
 - o It is very possible that the rebuilding of the temple will be a part of the 7-year treaty that Antichrist makes with Israel.
- When God has a prophet measure something, it usually shows that he has a connection with that place and is going to either judge it ([Zechariah 2](#)) or establish it ([Ezekiel 40](#) & [Revelation 21](#)).
- The outer courts are left out because they belong to the Gentiles
 - o Those courts were always designated as being for the Gentiles who wanted to come and worship God ("a house of prayer for all nations" – [Mark 11:17](#)).
 - o Apparently at this point, the Gentiles using the outer court have no intention of worshipping God.

- In fact, these Gentiles are described as trampling on Jerusalem for 42 months (3½ years).
 - This most likely refers to the second half of the tribulation.
 - i.e. This is after Antichrist has begun persecuting anyone Jewish.
 - In [Luke 21:24](#), Jesus uses very similar wording of Jerusalem being “trampled on by Gentiles” in reference to this period of intense persecution that ends with his return.
 - This statement introduces us to the two witnesses.

(3-6) The Ministry of the Two Witnesses

- (3a) The length of their ministry is 1,260 days.
 - i.e. 42 months / 3½ years
 - i.e. Their ministry lasts for half of the tribulation. Most people assume it is either the first or second half rather than a 3½ year chunk taken out of the middle (more on the exact timing once we get a few more pieces in place).

- (3b) Their appearance and primary activity:
 - They are dressed in sackcloth which shows mourning and coming judgment.
 - They prophesy (i.e. they deliver messages from God).
 - We are not told the exact content of their message, but we can probably assume it is similar to that of OT prophets.
 - It is probably some variation of “Repent because judgment is coming” and/or “Because you have refused to repent, you will be judged.”

- (4) Their symbolic description: two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before God
 - This description comes straight out of [Zechariah 4](#) where it describes Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua as God’s chosen instruments empowered by the Holy Spirit to restore the temple after returning from the Babylonian captivity.
 - A few take this to mean that the two witnesses *are* Zerubbabel and Joshua returned.
 - More likely, the emphasis is that these are also two men chosen and directly empowered by God the Holy Spirit, and nothing can hinder their ministry.

- (5-6) Their power from the Spirit:
 - (5) Anyone who tries to directly harm them is consumed by fire from their mouths.
 - This protection is similar to that of Elijah in [II Kings 1:9-15](#) (though there the fire comes from heaven rather than his mouth).
 - God knows the right time for his children to serve him and the right time for them to go and be with him, and nothing can thwart his will.
 - “I am immortal till my work is accomplished.” – David Livingstone
 - (6) In addition to the main sequences of judgments, these two inflict further plagues on the earth to show God’s wrath against sin.
 - Specifically mentioned are stopping rain (like Elijah) and turning water to blood (like Moses).
 - This leads us to some speculation about the exact identity of the witnesses.

- Speculation on their identities:
 - It is possible that the two witnesses *are* Moses & Elijah sent back to earth.
 - Their ministry is very similar.
 - [Malachi 4:5](#) promises that Elijah will come before the Day of the Lord, though this is at least partially fulfilled by John the Baptist ([Matthew 11:13-14](#)).
 - Moses & Elijah are the two most prominent spokesmen for God in the OT. They are the main representatives of the Law and the Prophets who appear with Jesus at his transfiguration ([Luke 9:30](#)).
 - Some people have proposed Enoch & Elijah because neither of them physically died so now they must come back and die to fulfill [Hebrews 9:27](#).
 - I find this to be a very weak argument – [Hebrews 9:27](#) is talking about the normal way that things work...God occasionally makes exceptions.
 - E.g. People who were resurrected like Lazarus or Jairus' daughter eventually died again (as far as we know), and Christians who are raptured never undergo physical death (“We shall not all sleep...” – [1 Corinthians 15:51](#)).
 - They could very well be two “ordinary people” who are saved after the rapture and then chosen and sent out by God in much the same way as Old Testament prophets.
 - Nothing in the passage indicates that these *have to be* OT Saints sent back to earth.
 - Similarities to Moses and Elijah could be because they are all empowered by the same Holy Spirit (e.g. [Luke 1:15-17](#)).
 - In the end, we don't have enough information to be dogmatic about it. What is important:
 - God never leaves mankind without clear testimony.
 - God makes plain his wrath against sin.
 - God's servants are unkillable as long as He has work for them to do on earth.

[\(7-13\) Their Death and Resurrection](#)

- [\(7-10\)](#) The witnesses are slain to the delight of the world.
 - The “beast from the abyss” is eventually able to kill them.
 - In [17:7-11](#) *beast from the abyss* refers to both the Revived Roman Empire as a whole and to its chief ruler (Antichrist) as an individual.
 - The witnesses are only killed after they have completely delivered their message.
 - They are killed in Jerusalem.
 - It is referred to as *Sodom* to emphasize moral filth.
 - It is referred to as *Egypt* to emphasize spiritual slavery.
 - People treat their dead bodies as a tourist attraction and exchange gifts like it was Christmas.
 - Sinful human nature would rather “shoot the messenger” than admit that suffering and coming judgment is the result of their own sins.
 - We should not be shocked, alarmed, or discouraged when looked down on (or worse) by society for standing against sin. That is the way of this broken world, and we are called to faithfulness in spite of it.

- [\(11-13\)](#) After 3½ days they very publicly return to life and are called up to heaven.
 - God unleashes an earthquake that destroys 1/10 of the city and 7,000 people.
 - Everyone is forced to acknowledge the glory and power of God (even if it doesn't lead to repentance).
 - Sometimes God's servants serve God through their deaths.
 - God has power over life and death.
 - In the big scheme of things, for God's servants, death is just an inconvenience.
 - God's judgment on sin cannot be stopped by harming his servants. Justice is coming!

[\(14\)](#) The Timing of Their Ministry

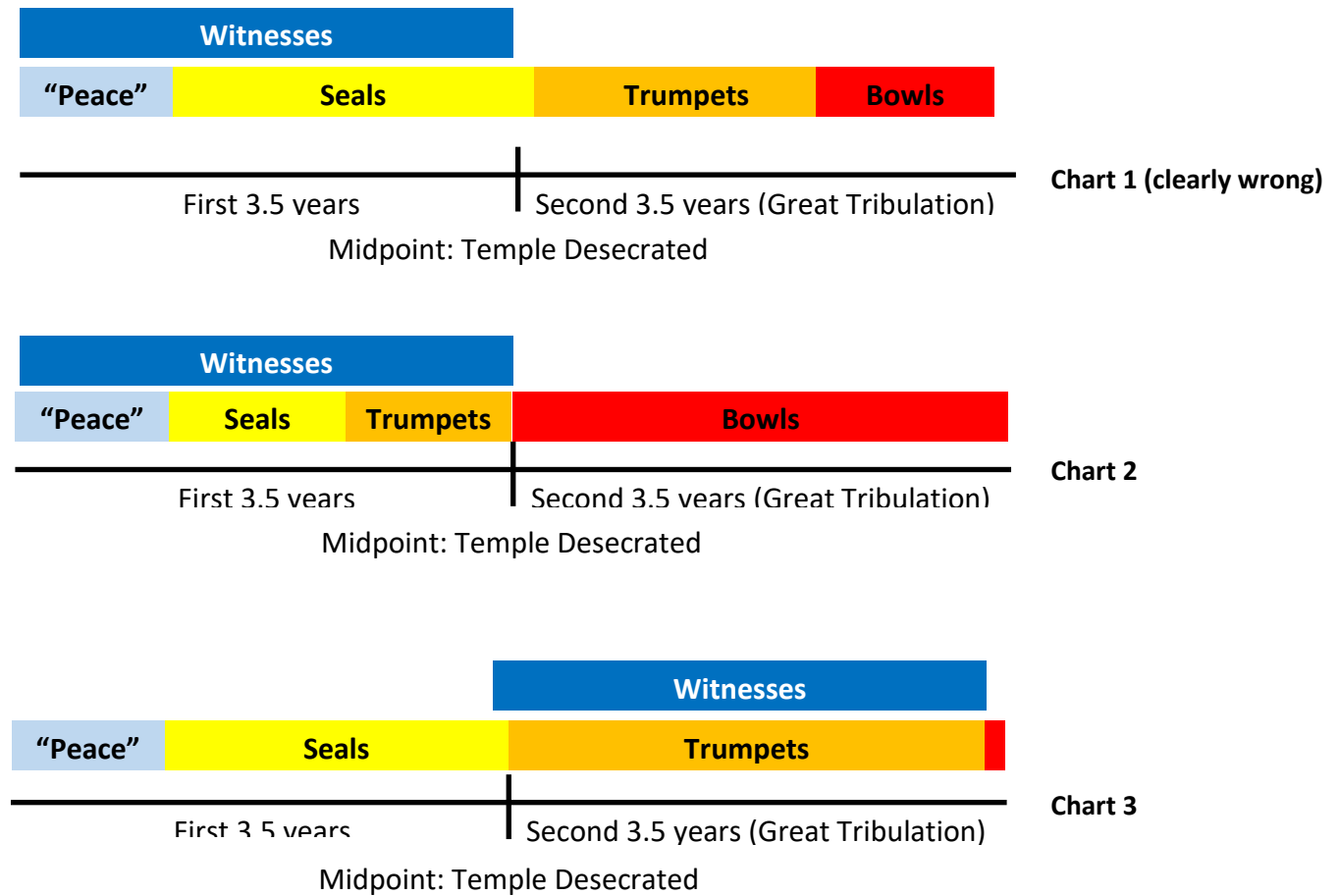
- Before carefully considering this verse, I had the impression that the witnesses' ministry and various judgments was something like this: Chart 1 on next page (a fairly common view, I think).
 - Their ministry occurs over the first half of the tribulation during the initial time of "peace" and at least some of the first six seal judgments.
 - Their death and resurrection occur at or shortly after the mid-point of the tribulation.
- This verse specifically ties the events of their death and resurrection to the conclusion of the second woe (aka the sixth trumpet – [8:13ff](#)). This requires some revision of the timeline.
 - Possibility #1 (Chart 2) – the first six trumpet judgments must be moved into the first half of the tribulation.
 - Pro: It places their witness in a time when people are more likely to hear and repent (though repentance is nowhere stated to be their primary message).
 - Con: It puts most of the divine judgment in the first half of the tribulation rather than during the actual 3½ year "Great Tribulation."
 - Possibility #2 (Chart 3) – The ministry of the two witnesses must be moved (at least in part) to the second half of the tribulation. (I favor this view.)
 - This makes sense with the statement that Jerusalem will be trampled for 3½ years ([11:2](#)) immediately preceding the introduction of the witnesses ([11:3](#)).
 - This places the climax of their ministry near the return of Christ rather than near the desecration of the temple by Antichrist.
 - The angel of chapter 10 said that when the seventh trumpet blows, it unleashes the final set of events ([10:7](#)).
 - Given their severity, the bowl judgments probably occur over a very brief amount of time ("Events accelerate exponentially like a woman's labor pains as the end draws near." – Dr. Yeager).

Conclusion

- We do not have as dramatic a ministry as these two witnesses, but much that will be true in their day and in their ministry is true in ours as well.
 - We are empowered by God himself as the Holy Spirit lives within us.
 - We need to be witnesses for God in both word and action.
 - We cannot delete God's wrath and coming judgment from our message. *It is coming.*

- God may choose for you to be his witness in a variety of ways:
 - o It may be through clearly supernatural protection.
 - o It may be through difficulty and suffering (e.g. showing trust/peace even in difficulty or tragedy).
 - o It may even be through death (e.g. Nate Saint and the Aucas, having a terminal illness).
 - o It is our responsibility to be faithful to him and proclaim him before the world in life and word no matter what the circumstances.

Charts: Timing of the Two Witnesses' Ministry



11:15-12:17 – The End Is Near

The 7th Trumpet & The Woman and the Dragon

Introduction

- An angel has already announced that the 7th trumpet brings in the fulfillment of all things.
- This passage has the 7th trumpet blown, but it is followed by a vision that covers a large period of time (going back at least as far as the birth of Christ).

(11:15-19) The 7th Trumpet Sounds

- (15) Many loud voices from heaven proclaim the establishment of God's Kingdom.
 - o It could be the voices of angels and/or of saints in heaven.
 - o This is a triumphant passage: the final stroke is about to be dealt which will put an end to all suffering and sin, transforming the whole earth into God's Kingdom.
 - Revelation is not meant to be frightening to God's people. It is meant to give us hope and encouragement to press on.
 - How long is God's Kingdom? Is it 1,000 years or forever?
 - Yes. The kingdom comes in two phases (The Millennium & the New Heaven & Earth).
 - There will be more on these when we get there.
- (16-18) The 24 elders once again worship and praise God.
 - o They emphasize God's eternal character and infinite power (a major theme of the book).
 - o They praise God that the time has come when he exercises his power and righteousness to the fullest and all will be made right.
 - The nations raging against him will feel his wrath (*see* Psalm 2).
 - The dead will be raised and judged or rewarded.
 - There are actually several resurrections and multiple judgments but this is a summary statement praising God for all of them (like Daniel 12:1-3).
 - This may mean that the judgment seat of Christ where Believers are rewarded takes place only after the tribulation (when the number of believers is complete – OT, Church Age, and Tribulation).
 - Those who destroy the earth will themselves be destroyed – this serves as a minor argument against annihilationism as it shows that *destruction* can be used to mean *utter ruin* rather than causing something to cease to exist.
- The heavenly temple opens and reveals the Ark of the Covenant accompanied by lightning, thunder, noise, an earthquake, and hail.
 - o The earthly Ark of the Covenant (maybe the same one taken up to heaven?) was the symbol and special dwelling place of God's presence and glory.
 - o Get ready! God is coming to earth in all his power and majesty!
 - o ...but that part of the story doesn't pick up again until chapter 15.

[\(12:1-17\)](#) The “Great Sign in Heaven”

- This whole chapter has a lot of symbolism.
 - o Very little of the symbolism is explained for us.
 - o However, much of the same symbolism occurs elsewhere in the Bible and/or has fairly obvious meaning, so we can understand the main gist of what is happening.
 - o As with the two witnesses, we should focus on the main points and not get bogged down in too much speculation over the details.

- This is basically an overview of some of the major events in the (rather one-sided) war between God and Satan.

[\(1-6\)](#) The Woman, the Son, and the Dragon

- [\(1-2\)](#) The woman
 - o Her identity: Israel
 - Some Catholics try to make it Mary because she gives birth to Jesus (v. [5](#)).
 - The symbolism is far broader than Mary – In [Genesis 37:9-11](#), sun, moon, and 11 stars (plus Joseph who is having the dream) is Jacob and his family (aka Israel).
 - o Birth pains: suffering of the Jewish people
 - Perhaps it is their suffering throughout their history.
 - Perhaps it is focused more on the time of Jesus birth and/or the Great Tribulation

- [\(3-4\)](#) The dragon
 - o Its Identity: Satan
 - Verse 9 clearly identifies him as such (Ancient serpent, the devil, Satan).
 - The description also closely resembles the symbolism used of the Roman Empire ([Daniel 7](#)), the Revived Roman Empire ([Revelation 13](#)), and by extension the Antichrist who rules the Revived Roman Empire ([Revelation 17](#)).
 - All of these things are ultimately tools of the great enemy: Satan.
 - o Tail sweeping 1/3 of the stars from heaven: This probably means that 1/3 of the angels followed Satan in his revolt (i.e. holy angels outnumber fallen angels 2:1).
 - o Waiting to kill the child as soon as he was born: Herod the Great (a Roman government official) tried to destroy Jesus shortly after his birth.

- [\(5\)](#) The Son
 - o His identity: Jesus
 - For rod/scepter of iron see [Psalm 2:6-9](#) (quoted again in [Revelation 19:15](#)).
 - For caught up to God in heaven see [Revelation 5:5-6a](#).
 - o Satan is powerless to truly harm him...even though he managed to kill him at the crucifixion (which God used for infinite good)!

- The woman flees to a place of refuge for 1,260 days (42 months / 3½ years).
 - o There is a large stretch of time between verses [5 & 6](#) – the time in which we are now living where Israel is not “center stage.”

- The 3 ½ years of shelter and provision:
 - This must be the second half of the tribulation since the Beast protects Israel during the first half ([Daniel 9:27](#)).
 - Some have speculated that Petra is the place of refuge. This is certainly possible since it is the closest known desert refuge, but it is far from certain.
 - At least a portion of the Jewish nation will be sheltered and provided for during the great tribulation.
 - [Matthew 24:15-16ff](#) – Jesus warns the Jews to flee to the mountains at the “abomination of desolation.”
 - It seems likely that this will be about 1/3 of the Jewish nation ([Zechariah 13:8-9](#)).
 - These are probably a large part of the ones who will survive long enough to participate in Israel’s national salvation when Christ returns ([Zechariah 12:10-11](#), [Romans 11:25-32](#)).
 - Whether the provision for them is natural or supernatural is unclear, but God has certainly done this in the past (Manna in the wilderness, Elijah fed by ravens, widow whose flour and oil never ran out, feeding of the 5,000, etc.).

War in Heaven

- ([7-9](#)) Satan and his followers are fully cast out of heaven and confined to the earth.
 - Names for God’s enemy: Dragon (fierceness and cunning), Ancient Serpent (from Eden), the devil (slanderer/accuser), and Satan (the enemy/adversary)
 - The timing for this is probably the mid-point of the tribulation (the start of the 1,260 days of intense persecution and judgment).
 - Michael rising in [Daniel 12:1](#) may be rising for this battle.
 - Satan originally thought he could defeat God, but he can’t even stand up to Michael and the holy angels.
- ([10-12](#)) Proclamation of Satan’s ultimate defeat:
 - Salvation is complete! Those in heaven are now free from the very presence of Satan and sin.
 - Satan is no longer allowed to stand in God’s presence slandering God’s children, which apparently is what he does right now...tempt us to sin and then tattle to God about it.
 - Christians are described as ultimately triumphing over Satan by the blood of Jesus Christ by which they stand firm even to the point of death.
 - What is cause for rejoicing in heaven means unparalleled suffering on earth. Satan knows his time is almost up and goes berserk.
- ([13-17](#)) Satan sets out to destroy the Jews (again).
 - ([13-14](#)) This seems to be a restatement of verse 6 with a few added details
 - *Time, times, and half a time* is 3½ years / 42 months / 1,260 days
 - *Wings like an eagle* has something to do with the manner of Israel’s escape (LaHaye and Jenkins speculate a massive airlift, but it could be something purely supernatural.)

- [\(15-16\)](#) Satan makes a huge effort to destroy the Jews as they flee, but God intervenes.
 - Flood from the dragon's mouth: literal flood? Huge army? Something else?
 - Swallowed by the ground: God has done this quite literally at least once before ([Numbers 16:28-35](#)).
- [\(17\)](#) Even more furious, Satan sets out to destroy any other Jews he can find.
 - He especially hates saved Jews (double hate!).
 - How he goes about isolating them from society and hunting them down picks up in chapter 13.

Conclusion

- The day is coming when all will be made right, and Satan can do nothing to stop it.
- God continues to mercifully protect a remnant of his people Israel.
- The Kingdom is coming...are our actions right now of eternal value?

13 – Satan’s Puppets

The Beast & The False Prophet

Introduction

- This chapter covers religious and political events (mostly in the last 3½ years).
 - o Once again, much of this is presented in very symbolic language.
 - o These events are orchestrated by Satan (“he knows his time is short” –[12:12](#)).
- The material in this chapter (and cross-references) is where a lot of people *really* get caught up in speculation.
 - o It’s okay to speculate how current trends may be leading in this direction.
 - o We can’t let that speculation distract us from what is actually revealed.
 - o We can’t let that speculation make us fearful (e.g. Christians who worry every time things start heating up in the Middle East or whenever a new form of ID comes out).

(1-10) The Beast from the Sea

(1-2) His Appearance

- (1a) Coming out of the sea:
 - o In [Revelation 17:15](#), the sea symbolizes “peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.” (and similar symbolism is used elsewhere – e.g. [Isaiah 17:12](#)).
 - o This individual is the head of an empire coming out of the Gentile nations (the distinction between the ruler and his empire is fairly blurred throughout Revelation).
- (1b) Seven heads with ten horns:
 - o This closely matches the symbolism of the revived Roman Empire in [Daniel 7](#).
 - It focuses on the blasphemous ruler of that empire (“little horn” of [Daniel 7](#)).
 - Other titles for this man are: the man of lawlessness and one doomed to destruction (KJV – son of perdition – [II Thessalonians 2:3](#)), the ruler who will come ([Daniel 9:26](#)), the Antichrist (see [I John 2:18](#) for antichrist as a general term for those who oppose Christ).
 - o Ten Horns are ten kings/nations that make up the Empire.
 - Three are destroyed by Antichrist ([Daniel 9:20](#)) – perhaps as he consolidates power. This could be some of the warfare during the seal judgments.
 - Most likely, these ten nations were originally part of the Roman Empire since this is the Revived Roman Empire (Western Europe, the Middle East, N. Africa).
 - o 7 heads is a new feature not found in Daniel, but in [Revelation 17:7-11](#) they represent seven hills (of Rome) and seven kings/kingdoms (more when we get to chapter 17).
 - o Names of blasphemy on his heads probably refers to him claiming to be God.
 - e.g. Antiochus IV who desecrated the temple in 167BC used the title “the revealed god” / Roman Emperor Domitian claiming the titles “the divine,” “son of a god,” and “Lord and god.”
 - Of Antichrist: see below

- (2a) Combination of other animals:
 - o In [Daniel 7](#), these animals represent other empires (leopard: Greece, Bear: Medo-Persia, Lion: Babylon).
 - o The beast's empire will retain elements of previous world empires.
- (2b) Power and authority from the dragon:
 - o He is directly empowered by Satan himself, who has been allowed a high degree of control over the world ([Luke 4:5-7](#)).
 - o It would appear that this politician is already on the stage before this point.
 - In the first half of tribulation he is making conquests ([Revelation 6:1-2](#)) and mediating a 7-year peace treaty with Israel ([Daniel 9:27](#)).
 - With Satan's power, he begins wielding unparalleled authority for 42 months.
 - This doesn't necessarily mean every place on earth directly acknowledges his rule (his power is centered in the revived Roman Empire, and there are still wars/revolts against him).
 - This is s as close as the earth will come to uniting under a single *human* government.

(3-8) His Actions

- (3-6) He undergoes "resurrection" and "deification."
 - o (3) He will seem to receive a mortal wound from which he recovers.
 - It will probably be either an assassination attempt or a war wound.
 - This is probably not a genuine resurrection (I doubt Satan has that power), but a convincing enough counterfeit to persuade the world that he is divine.
 - "Imagine if JFK had climbed out of the casket and said, 'I'm back, and guess what: I'm God.'" – Stan Walker
 - o (4) He becomes not only the most powerful political ruler, but the object of worship (and through him Satan is worshipped).
 - o (5-6) He blasphemes against God for 42 months (3½ years).
 - II Thessalonians 2:4 – He Claims to be God and is worshipped in the temple.
 - [Daniel 9:27](#) – He stops the worship of God in the temple and desecrates it.
 - In a "preview" of this, Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" did so by sacrificing a pig on the altar and setting up an idol of Zeus in the temple in 167BC.
 - See also: [Daniel 7:25](#) and more below
- (7-8) The only people who do not worship him are those who are (or will be) saved, and he persecutes them intensely. This grim warning comes with encouragement.
 - o Encouragement: Your salvation was secure from before the world was made ("from the foundation of the world" could refer either to Christ's death or to your name being written).
 - o Those who are truly saved persevere in their faith.
 - [I Peter 1:5](#) – We are kept in our faith by God's power, not our own effort.
 - [I John 2:19](#) – Those who completely turn their back on their faith and embrace error (John calls them antichrists) demonstrate that they were never truly saved.

- (9-10) There is further encouragement that justice is coming.
 - The passage quoted is [Jeremiah 15:2](#) which, in context, is about how inevitable God's judgment against sin is.
 - Until justice arrives, Christians need to keep on with daily faithfulness no matter what difficulties they are facing (and ours are so small compared to what people of that era will face!).

[\(11-18\) The Beast from the Earth](#)

[\(11\) Appearance](#)

- From the earth: This is in contrast with being from heaven.
- Horns like a lamb:
 - He has an appearance of gentleness and/or this is an imitation of Christian symbolism.
 - This person oversees the religious side of Antichrist's reign, and is referred to as the False Prophet in [Revelation 19:20](#).
- Speaks like a dragon: He has words of Satanic power, authority, and deceptiveness.

[\(12-18\) His Actions](#)

- [\(12\)](#) He directs the world to worship the Beast.
 - He is basically the leader (and possibly founder) of the one world religion.
 - Satan has set up a sort of imitation "trinity" – the False Prophet ("spirit") directs worship to the Antichrist ("son") who does the will of the Dragon ("father").
- [\(13-14a\)](#) He performs miraculous signs as "proof" of the beast's deity.
 - Some suggest that this is pure trickery, but it is more likely, actual Satanic power (e.g. Satan's supernatural abilities in what he does to Job and his family in [Job 1-2](#)).
 - This is a good reminder that someone being able to do amazing things or making us feel excited or spiritual does not mean that the power or feelings come from God.
 - "Spiritual experiences are not self-authenticating" (i.e. just because I feel or experience something spiritual does not mean that God was behind it).
 - If something (a teaching, an experience, an urge, a feeling) contradicts God's Word, it must be rejected no matter how attractive or how spectacular the immediate results (e.g. [John 4:1-3](#)).
- [\(14b-15\)](#) He sets up an idol/image as the focus of worship for Antichrist.
 - In some way, this idol appears to be alive and thinking.
 - It may be purely demonic power.
 - There may be some technology involved such as Artificial Intelligence and/or holograms (e.g. hologram of Tupac Shakur).
 - The image will be set up in the Jerusalem temple ([Daniel 11:31](#) – the abomination that causes desolation).
 - Refusing to worship this image will be a capital crime.

- (16-18) He institutes a religious loyalty mark consisting of the beast's name or number.
 - o It will be required for financial transactions.
 - Finances are not the primary focus – it is just one way of forcing everyone to get the mark (if you don't have it you are outside society).
 - Speculation: To help enforce this, the mark *might* incorporate some sort of ID chip (current technology: an RFID transmitter in a tiny glass bead that can be used for passing security checkpoints, accessing medical records, conducting financial transactions with Bitcoins, operating electronic devices, etc.).
 - o The main point: it is an actual, visible mark of some sort (probably a tattoo?) that shows you to be a worshipper of the beast (and thus, not a "traitor deserving of death").
 - Almost everywhere that it occurs it is paired with worshipping the beast ([14:9](#), [14:11](#), [16:2](#), [19:20](#), [20:4](#)).
 - Possibly it is received in a ceremony similar to the old Roman one where you were forced to burn a pinch of incense to Caesar as a god to prove your loyalty.
 - It is not something that people will get by accident (there is no "oops...turns out that new form of ID was the mark of the beast and now I'm doomed").
 - o The number connected with his name is 666.
 - Most likely, this means that the letters in his name add up to 666 when taken as numbers (a practice called *gematria*).
 - This was a common practice in the Greek and Hebrew-speaking world that would have been well known to John's original readers.
 - e.g. "I love her whose name is 545" – graffiti found in Pompeii
 - e.g. the Hebrew *gematria* of my first name is 47.
 - Some people offer other possibilities, but they mostly involve general statements about his character rather than being something that could be calculated to identify a specific individual (e.g. 6 is one short of the perfect number 7 and repeated three times shows he is completely falls short of God).
 - Whatever the case, this number will help confirm his identity to those living during the tribulation, but in the meantime, it's not something to be superstitious about ([I John 4:4](#)).

Conclusion

- God allows man to achieve the dream of a (more-or-less) one world government and one world religion, and it is horrific because it is built on Satan's power.
 - o This comes with a reminder that spectacular events and exciting feelings are not a measure of truth.
 - o This is one reason to be thankful that we won't be here for any of this.
- Do not fear (the opposite of what many people get out of this passage).
 - o God loves you so much that he chose to save you before the universe existed and you are forever secure.
 - o Justice is coming (repeated over and over in this book). There is no need to panic when the wicked prosper in government because God is the one who is ultimately directing the course of history.

14 – Triumph & Warnings

Introduction

- This is another difficult chapter to interpret
- It seems to be an overview of the rest of the book showing God’s ultimate triumph (following on the heels of Chapter 13 which was an overview of Satan’s seemingly absolute authority).

(1-5) The 144,000 Triumphant

- (1) Their identity: the same as the 144,000 in chapter 6
 - o There is no reason to see them as a separate group.
 - o They are 12,000 Jewish believers from each of 12 tribes of Israel, specially chosen and sealed by God.
- Their location: Mount Zion (also spelled Sion)
 - o *Zion* can refer to either the earthly hill in Jerusalem and, by extension, Jerusalem itself (e.g. [II Samuel 5:7](#)) or to the heavenly new Jerusalem (e.g. [Hebrews 12:22](#)).
 - o Since the next verse talks about a voice from heaven, I think this is the earthly Mt. Zion.
 - The seal of God may further indicate that they are specially protected by God to survive the 7-year tribulation period.
 - If this *is* the heavenly Mt. Zion, it would seem to indicate that all 144,000 of these witnesses are martyred during the tribulation.
 - o Either way, the point is that the 144,000 stand victorious with Jesus Christ.
- (2-3) Their song:
 - o They join in the thunderous praise that surrounds the throne of God.
 - o The song sung by the 144,000 is unique to them.
 - ...just like our praise to God is different in subject from that of the holy angels (we sing of our Savior which is something they have not experienced).
 - This group with their own unique role in a specific phase of God’s plan have their own unique things to praise God about (as do all of us in some way).
- (4-5) Their character:
 - o They are virgins.
 - This is probably partly due to the wisdom of remaining unmarried during a time of such hardship and urgent witness ([I Corinthians 7:25-35](#)).
 - It is certainly in contrast to the sexual immorality in society ([Revelation 9:21](#)).
 - Despite what culture says, being sexually active or following all your sexual urges is not a necessary part of being a healthy human being.
 - God clearly limits sex to within a heterosexual, married relationship.
 - Virginity is also used symbolically of moral purity in general (e.g. [Jeremiah 18:13](#), [II Corinthians 11:2](#)).
 - o They have a special place of honor around Jesus (one of their eternal rewards?).
 - o They are described as the “firstfruits” of the redeemed – a reference to them being the first ones saved during the tribulation and/or of their complete dedication to God.

- They live exceptionally holy lives.
 - There is nothing deceitful about them (in a time when being deceitful would probably increase your chance of survival).
 - Ultimately, they are pure for the same reason we are: the blood of Christ.

(6-13) Various Messages

- (6-7) The first angel: The everlasting Gospel
 - *Gospel* means *Good News*.
 - This is a broader message than the Gospel of grace.
 - It is only good news for those who are saved by grace through faith.
 - The message:
 - Fear, glorify, and worship God.
 - Fear: Show proper respect and awe.
 - Glorify and worship: Praise and acknowledge him for who he is.
 - This will only be a joy for those who belong to him, but everyone *will* fear, glorify, and worship him ([Philippians 2:9-11](#)).
 - The time for justice has arrived! A world is coming in which there will be no more sin or any of its effects.
 - All our desires will be good, everything we do will be pleasurable to us and God (no having to stop and think “is it okay for me to do this?”).
 - There will be no more twisted people or twisted creation to hinder the accomplishment of all that is good, beautiful, and truly pleasurable.
 - This will not be a world full of boring puppets, but a world where joy and creativity will find its fullest expression without hindrance to the glory of God and in his presence.

- (8) The second angel: The fall of Babylon
 - This is dealt with in much more detail in chapters 17-18.
 - Babylon is basically the cultural, religious, economic system that promotes wickedness. The heart of this system is in either the city of Rome or a literal, rebuilt city of Babylon.
 - The point for now is that those who are responsible for spreading moral filth, greed, and false religion will be destroyed.

- (9-11) The third angel: The doom of those who worship the beast
 - Those who throw in their lot with the beast are beyond repentance and will face the full-strength wrath of God (illustrated as undiluted wine).
 - The result is unending physical punishment for those who reject the offered salvation.

- (12-13) Encouragement
 - These verses are addressed primarily to the tribulation saints, but the general principles apply.
 - These saints are reminded to have endurance through the hardships they will face because justice is coming and if they die it is a transition into peace, rest, and rewards. (“You can kill us, but you cannot harm us.” – Justin Martyr 100-165AD)

(14-20) The Reaping of the Earth

- (14-16) The Son of Man reaps the earth:
 - o The description of Jesus matches the description in [Daniel 7:13-14](#) (see also “The Lord of the Harvest” – [Matthew 9:38](#)).
 - o The reaping seems to symbolize the judgments on the earth in a general way.
 - The word translated *ripe* has the idea of being over-ripe and dried out.
 - The Father sends word that harvest time has come.
 - This isn’t God desperately mashing the panic reset button because things have gotten too far out of control. It is the consummation of his plan for the ages.
 - An application for us today: this requires patience from us...with God, and *with each other* ([James 5:7-9](#)).

- (17-20) The final reaping:
 - o The battle of Armageddon and surrounding events are dealt with in more detail in chapters 17-19.
 - o The symbolic illustration is gathering ripe grapes and violently stomping them in the winepress of God’s wrath.
 - o In this huge battle, blood flows in huge quantities and is splattered as high as horses’ bridles for about 180 miles outside “the city” (presumably, Jerusalem). Satan’s stand against Jesus is even more one-sided than Custer’s Last Stand.

Conclusion:

- Satan may appear to win for a while, but he is powerless before God.

- God’s children are protected.
 - o For some, that protection is *from* hardship and death.
 - o For others, it is *through* hardship and death.

- We must have patient endurance.
 - o That means not losing hope or becoming angry at God in the midst of difficulty.
 - o That means not becoming irritable, complaining people toward fellow believers.

15-16 – Wrath Poured Out

The Bowl Judgments

Introduction

- Now, John finally picks back up with what happens after the seventh trumpet sounds.
 - o This is it! The Kingdom of God is about to arrive and sweep away evil from the earth!
 - o That is accomplished by the third sequence of judgments: the bowl judgments.

- Timewise, we are probably within weeks or days of the end of the return of Christ.
 - o Like labor pains accelerating, the judgments come closer and closer together.
 - o These last judgments are so severe that they practically destroy the earth.
 - o God’s wrath is about to be fully poured out on the earth.

(15) Prelude to the Final Judgments

- Verses [2-4](#) are similar to the praise scenes in chapters [4](#) and [7](#).
 - o [\(2a\)](#) As in [4:6](#), the “sea of glass” would reflect God’s glory, but now it is also flaming with fire – probably an indication of the coming wrath and judgment.
 - o [\(2b\)](#) The sea of glass is surrounded by those who have overcome the Beast and his system (the “uncountable multitude” of [7:9-17?](#)).
 - o [\(3-4\)](#) They sing praise to God.
 - This time, they are also playing harps or lyres in accompaniment.
 - The “Song of Moses” could be one of several passages: [Exodus 15:1-18](#), [Deuteronomy 32:1-43](#), [Psalm 90](#).
 - All deal with God’s vindication of the righteous and punishment of sin.
 - [Deuteronomy 32:39-43](#) seems especially appropriate for Armageddon.
 - The “Song of the Lamb” emphasizes several things about God:
 - His perfect righteousness and justice as rightful judge of all
 - His authority as the rightful ruler of all
 - His glory as the only true God who will one day be worshipped by all

- [\(5-8\)](#) The final judgments make an entrance worthy of their seriousness.
 - o They are pictured as golden bowls full of the wrath of God ready to be poured onto the earth.
 - o The sanctuary of the heavenly temple is so full of God’s glory that no one can bear it even though everyone there is perfect!
 - o God’s glory, holiness, and hatred for sin should make us think twice before deliberately sinning!

(16) The Bowl Judgments

- [\(1-2\)](#) Painful sores appear on those who have allied themselves with the beast.
 - o This would be everyone who isn’t saved ([13:8](#)).
 - o Rebellion against God brings suffering, both as natural consequences and as God’s direct judgment.
 - o God continues to preserve those who belong to him.

- (3) The sea turns to something like dead man's blood, killing all sea life.
 - o Trumpet #2 has already done this to 1/3 of the oceans.
 - o These bowl judgments quickly render the earth uninhabitable.

- (4-7) All fresh water sources turn to blood.
 - o Trumpet #3 has already poisoned 1/3 of the fresh water sources.
 - o Two voices acknowledge God's justice in what he is doing:
 - An angel in charge of the waters (an interesting hint that angels are more involved in the world than we realize – see angel in charge of fire in [14:18](#))
 - A voice from the altar – probably the saints who cried for justice at the opening of the fifth seal ([6:9-11](#))
 - o Divine justice often involves “poetic justice.”
 - Those who are bloodthirsty toward God's saints now have blood to drink.
 - Haman attempts to disgrace Mordecai and is hanged on his own gallows.
 - The proper penalty for murder is execution.
 - Sinning against eternal, infinite God brings eternal, infinite consequences.
 - Refusing to come to God in this life means separation from him in the next.

- (8-9) The sun begins severely burning people.
 - o God is in control of all things natural and supernatural. We're not going to destroy the earth and make it uninhabitable; God is.
 - This is not an excuse for poor stewardship of the earth and its resources.
 - It is a reminder to not be worried by alarmist end-of-the-world theories.
 - o The wicked do not repent even after a sample of God's wrath against sin.

- (10-11) The kingdom of the Beast is cast into darkness and the pain of previous judgments intensifies.
 - o Given the Beast's more-or-less worldwide rule, this may affect the entire globe or may be centered on his revived Roman Empire.
 - o Burning darkness and physical suffering are common themes in descriptions of eternal punishment. Even with a foretaste of hell people refuse to repent.
 - o Excuses that “if only God would [X] people would repent” are wrong. Throughout history, God demonstrates that the human heart is rebellious under any circumstances.
 - Eden: perfection – They disobey their one rule.
 - Right and wrong left up to conscience: Cain murders Abel and the earth becomes so corrupt that God has to “reboot” with the flood.
 - Law: strict set of rules and clear sacrificial system – constant disobedience and spiritual unfaithfulness ending in being removed from the Promised Land
 - Church Age: the whole plan of salvation clearly revealed in Jesus Christ – in many ways, the world becomes steadily worse.
 - Tribulation: God's wrath against sin and man's need for salvation never clearer – blasphemy and continued rebellion
 - Millennial Kingdom: perfect conditions with Jesus ruling – a final rebellion
 - o Be thankful for God's grace in choosing us and drawing us to him.

- [\(12-16\)](#) The Euphrates river dries up in preparation for war.
 - o [\(12\)](#) Though the Beast claims worldwide rule, apparently there is rebellion in the land beyond the Euphrates (modern Iran, Afghanistan, India, Russia, China, etc.).
 - o [\(13-14\)](#) The source of this war is evil spirits that go out from the “unholy trinity.”
 - This appears to be a series of battles with one final one described in Chapter 19. There are almost as many ways to understand the various major battles in Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation as there are commentaries.
 - It seems like the “unholy trinity” is provoking this war on purpose. Satan’s main goal is to destroy ([John 8:44](#) – “...a murderer from the beginning...”).
 - o [\(15\)](#) There is another warning to stay alert and steadfast.
 - Don’t “go with the flow” because that is like stripping off your clothes of righteousness and running around shamefully naked.
 - The same applies to us. We want to live in such a way that when Jesus returns we are unreservedly happy to see him, not shrinking back in shame ([John 2:28](#)).
 - o [\(16\)](#) The final battle of this conflict takes place at “Armageddon.”
 - This is from the Hebrew *Har Megiddo* (Mount Megiddo).
 - Other names for the area around Megiddo include: plains of Jezreel, Valley of Jehoshaphat, and Plains of Esdraelon.
 - It includes a section of plains/farmland in a valley 20 miles long X 14 miles wide, and one of the main entrances is a narrow pass that goes past Mount Megiddo.
 - Various major battles have been fought at Megiddo: Egypt vs. Canaanites (15th c. BC), Saladin vs. the Crusaders (12th c. AD), Mamelukes vs. Mongols (14th c. AD), Napoleon vs. Ottomans (1799), WWI Allies vs. Ottomans (1918), plus multiple battles in the Bible (Barack, Saul, Solomon, Josiah).
 - This is the focal point of the last battle, but the carnage extends for nearly 200 miles ([14:20](#)) – more detail in chapter 19.

- [17-21](#) – THE END: Utter destruction on the earth
 - o [\(17\)](#) The end is announced.
 - o [\(18-20\)](#) A massive earthquake levels everything.
 - Jerusalem splits into three parts.
 - Gentile cities collapse – basically, whatever is left of civilization is flattened.
 - Babylon (Rome?) is destroyed (more in chapters 17-18).
 - All islands sink and mountains are leveled.
 - o [\(21\)](#) Hundred-pound hailstones cause more destruction and kill more people – those who are alive continue to curse God.

Conclusion

- As we have seen the absolute stubborn corruption of humanity: Praise and thank God for working in your heart to draw you to him & don’t give up on witnessing – God is still at work.

- Make sure you are living in a way that when Jesus comes to take you home you can rejoice, not cringe in shame – going with the flow of the world is like running around shamefully naked.

17:1-19:5 – Fallen Is Babylon

Introduction

- Many popular commentators and preachers treat chapters 17 and 18 as two different versions or phases of Babylon (one religious & one political) and two separate events (which requires quite a bit of speculation to fill in details).
- The wording and descriptions between the two chapters is so similar that I see no textual reason for interpreting in such a complex way (see chart).
 - o It seems to be a single unified event about a single entity called “Babylon.”
 - o Chapter 17 symbolically records its identity and destruction and Chapter 18 records people’s reaction to the destruction.

Chart: Babylon Identical in Chapters 17 & 18

| Description | Chapter 17 | Chapter 18 |
|---|------------|-------------|
| Called “Babylon the Great” | Verse 5 | Verse 2 |
| A powerful city | Verse 18 | Verses 9-10 |
| Clothed in purple & scarlet and adorned with precious stones & pearls | Verse 4 | Verse 16 |
| The kings of the earth commit adultery with her | Verse 2 | Verse 3 |
| Having a cup of wickedness | Verse 4 | Verse 6 |
| Guilty of the blood of the saints | Verse 6 | Verse 24 |
| Burned with fire | Verse 16 | Verse 8 |

(17) *The Prostitute on the Beast*

(1-6) The Symbolic Vision of Babylon

- (1-2) She is a prostitute.
 - o Adultery is probably both widespread literal sexual immorality and symbolic.
 - o Throughout the Bible, unfaithfulness to God is described as spiritual adultery.
 - It can be unfaithfulness by following a false religion ([Ezekiel 6:9](#)).
 - It can be by unfaithfulness by forsaking righteousness in general ([Isaiah 1:21](#)).
 - It can be unfaithfulness through materialism and worldliness ([James 4:4](#)).
 - o Given the variety within “spiritual adultery,” those who say that this description of Babylon is *only* about a “false church” are probably over-simplifying.
- (3) She is riding on a beast with 7 heads, ten horns, and blasphemous names.
 - o This matches the description of the Beast and his revived Roman empire in [13:1-10](#).
 - o Babylon is in some sense separate from the Beast: a world system that works with him.

- (4) She is decked out in costly clothing and jewelry and carrying a cup of abominations, wickedness, and sexual immorality.
 - o This is a pretty good description of the world's way of acting even today.
 - Materialism – the accumulation of wealth, luxury, leisure, etc.
 - Freely speaking against God (see any comments section on the internet)
 - Every kind of perversion and sexual practice becoming acceptable
 - o During the tribulation, this worldview will be universal, centered on the city of Babylon.

- (5) Her name is “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of the earth's abominations.”
 - o *Mystery* is probably an adjective describing her name (something revealed by God), not part of the name.
 - o Babylon was first founded in [Genesis 11:1-9](#).
 - There it is referred to as “Babel in the plains of Shinar.”
 - It was the first major act of rebellion against God following the Flood.
 - o Babylon is widely believed to have founded the first false religion (possibly tied to the mighty hunter and Empire-building King Nimrod of [Genesis 10:8-10](#)).
 - This religion generated (or heavily influenced) other false religions.
 - Compare worship of divine mother and child from Babylon (Duttur & Dumuzi), Canaan (Asherah “Queen of Heaven” & Baal), Egypt (Isis & Horus), India (Devaki & Krishna), Greece (Aphrodite & Eros – Roman names: Venus & Cupid), Roman Catholicism / Eastern Orthodoxy (Mary “Queen of Heaven” & Jesus), etc.
 - o From the Great Flood on, Babylon became the embodiment of opposition to God: rejecting his commands and refusing to worship him alone (the Mother of Prostitutes).

- (6) She is drunk with the blood of the saints.
 - o Babylon is responsible for the martyrdom of God's people.
 - o She kills them gleefully.

[\(7-15\)](#) The Interpretation of the Symbolic Vision

- (8) The beast existed, is not currently in existence, but will soon come up from the abode of Satan and then face condemnation.
 - o Once was: This may refer to Antiochus IV “Epiphanes” (a forerunner/type of antichrist).
 - o And is not: The Antichrist and his government do not currently exist (in John's day).
 - o Comes out of the pit: once Antichrist takes power, his power derives from Satan.
 - o As seen before, only the saved do not worship him.

- (9-10) 7 heads represent both 7 hills/mountains and 7 kings.
 - o 7 hills probably refers to Rome: “the City on Seven Hills.”
 - o 7 kings/empires:
 - Five have fallen: Probably Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece
 - One that is: Rome (the world power in John's day)
 - One not yet come: Revived Rome, which is Antichrist's Empire

- [\(11\)](#) The beast as a whole is of the 7th kingdom (Revived Rome) but is also an 8th individual (i.e. Antichrist/The Beast from the Sea).
- [\(12-14\)](#) Ten horns are 10 kings who are under Antichrist (“vassal states”).
 - o They rule only a short while (the entire tribulation period is only 7 years).
 - o Antichrist is in authority over them (no “round table” here).
 - o Apparently, they are not the only kings in existence...just the ones who make up the “inner circle” of Antichrist’s government (e.g. other kings appear in Chapter 18).
 - o They will be destroyed by Jesus at his coming with his people (chapter 19).
- [\(15\)](#) The water represents the people of the world at large; all are under her spell.

[\(16-18\)](#) The Destruction of Babylon

- This is not just an apostate church as many have claimed – it is directly stated to be a ruling city. It is probably Antichrist’s capital city before he turns on it.
 - o It may be a literal rebuilt Babylon (in modern Iraq).
 - o More likely, it is Rome (his Empire is the Revived *Roman* Empire, the “city on 7 hills” is an ancient name for Rome, and [I Peter 5:13](#) uses *Babylon* as “code” for Rome).
 - o It has not only religious dimensions (maybe a spinoff of the Catholic Church?), but it is also the political, entertainment, and commercial center of the world.
- He gets tired of anyone other than himself wielding absolute authority (or there may be other motivations), and his ten Kings wipe it out as a way of consolidating his power.
 - o Think *Star Wars*: The Emperor does away with the Senate so he and his planetary governors have absolute power.
 - o The destruction is described as devouring flesh and fire (maybe nuclear weapons?).
- This is done at the instigation of God. God uses even wicked men to carry out His will.

[\(18:1-19:5\)](#) Reactions to Babylon’s Destruction

- [\(1-3\)](#) An angel declares judgment.
 - o Babylon is made utterly desolate.
 - o The world system which glories in wealth, blasphemy, persecution, and sexual immorality has its main city wiped out.
- [\(4-8\)](#) a voice from heaven warns saints to have nothing to do with Babylon so that they will not be caught up in her destruction.
 - o [\(4-6\)](#) Similarly, Christians caught up in worldly living may face some of the judgment that those sins bring with them (not eternal, but immediate consequences).
 - We are urged to be holy like our Father ([I Peter 1:16](#)).
 - If we are not on our guard, it is easy to start thinking like the world and become attached to possessions, sinful pleasures, and ungodly practices.

- [\(7-8\)](#) Babylon feels invincible and at ease, but sin ultimately brings God’s wrath.
 - Every unrepentant/unforgiven sin will be punished to the full.
 - Those in the world may feel invincible, but God’s wrath *will* fall on the unrepentant, and “it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” ([Hebrews 10:31](#)).
- [\(9-10\)](#) Kings of the earth mourn Babylon’s passing.
 - Apparently, these are kings other than the ten kings who destroyed her.
 - Rulers who play the crooked political money games will no longer be able to do so.
- [\(11-19\)](#) Merchants will mourn the loss of their market and wares.
 - “Babylon” is the financial hub of the world and all commerce is virtually wiped out.
 - The world system that is based on acquiring money and things ceases to exist.
 - Those who profit off the vanity and greed of others are ruined.
- [\(20\)](#) An unidentified speaker urges all who belong to God to rejoice that justice has arrived!
- [\(21-24\)](#) An angel proclaims the eternal destruction of Babylon.
 - Never again will Babylon the city be rebuilt (final fulfillment of [Isaiah 13](#)).
 - Never again will the sinful, twisted world system exist!
- [\(19:1-5\)](#) – Those in heaven rejoice in Babylon’s fall.
 - [\(1-2\)](#) It is a great and wonderful thing that God has removed Babylon.
 - God is starting the process of restoring the earth to its proper condition by removing the evil world system built on greed, perversion, immorality, and the slaying of God’s children.
 - [\(3\)](#) Sin against a holy eternal God brings eternal consequences. It has no place in God’s eternal Kingdom.
 - [\(4-5\)](#) Anticipation builds! The world system is done for and now for Satan and his minions!
 - Imagine living in a world that does not have a culture of sin.
 - No greed: no need to compete with others to acquire wealth or possessions or scrape together just enough to get by
 - No political scheming: being able to completely trust those in authority over you to look out for everyone’s best interest and make everyone happy
 - No blasphemy: no one speaking against God and his Word
 - No persecution: completely free to deepen your relationship with God with no interference and no one trying to hinder you or even looking down on you
 - No immorality: no one and nothing tempting you to do something you shouldn’t

Conclusion

- The details of this passage can be very hard to understand, but the main point is that God is going to do away with Babylon, a city that functions as the center of this world's way of thinking.
- Don't be involved in "Babylon's" way of thinking and acting. Living for the accumulation of wealth, possessions, and forbidden temporary pleasure is not God-honoring ([1 John 2:15-17](#)).
- Look forward to the day when "the world" is not the same thing as "our enemy's way of thinking"...and the absence of sin is only the beginning of what God has planned!

19:6-21 – The End of the World as We Know It

The Marriage Feast of the Lamb & Armageddon

Introduction

- Celebration and praise in heaven continues to build.
- Attention shifts from the destruction of the prostitute to the wedding of the bride.

(6-10) The Marriage Feast of the Lamb

- How Jewish/Middle Eastern weddings often worked:
 - o A marriage contract was made and a dowry paid, making the couple betrothed (much more serious than an engagement). This could occur *years* before the wedding.
 - o When everything was finally ready, the groom with his friends would come to the bride's house and escort her back to his house.
 - o After this, there would be a huge (often week-long) wedding feast at the groom's house.
- **(6-8)** The announcement:
 - o Hallelujah means "Praise the Lord!"
 - o The climax of history for this present earth has come: God will assume complete control over the earth and Jesus Christ will celebrate being together forever with His bride.
 - First there was payment for the bride (death/resurrection to provide salvation)
 - ...then escorting the bride home (the rapture)
 - ...now the celebration!
- The bride:
 - o She is the church ([Ephesians 5:25-27](#))
 - The church is made up of all saved people from Pentecost to the rapture.
 - She is *not* the "Baptist Bride" as taught by Landmark Baptists.
 - o She is clothed in white linen which represents righteous deeds.
 - At salvation we receive Christ's righteousness which makes us holy in God's eyes *and* enables us to do things that are truly righteous.
 - Salvation isn't just "fire insurance." It produces righteous acts ([Ephesians 2:10](#)).
- **(9)** The wedding feast:
 - o There are guests present besides the bride: probably OT saints and Tribulation saints.
 - o The nature of the feast ([Isaiah 25:6-8](#)): not an uncomfortable formal banquet, but a joyous celebration that is probably more like a Jewish/Middle Eastern wedding.
 - There will be plenty of food (we will eat in eternity. Whether we will need to or not is unclear, but if we do need to there will never be any lack).
 - There will be Plenty of wine (e.g. [Isaiah 25:6](#), [Matthew 26:29](#)), but no sinful drunkenness.

- It is a huge celebration because the point of ancient weddings was to be joyful. They were not somber occasions.
 - Jewish wedding feasts today tend to have a minimum of planning and focus on just having a good time while honoring the bride and groom.
 - E.g. parading the bride and groom around on chairs, dancing, singing
 - Given the timing of this announcement and presence of guests, this probably takes place after the battle of Armageddon and connected judgments (not during the tribulation).
 - All of God's people are going to celebrate together ([Hebrews 11:39-40](#)).
 - This will be an incredible celebration to be a part of! A party with the saints from all of history and Jesus Himself with the church in a place of honor.
- ([10](#)) There is a brief misunderstanding.
 - John is so overwhelmed that he tries to worship the angel.
 - Angels are our fellow-servants, not beings to be worshipped.

(11-21) The Second Coming of Christ

- In order to set up his perfect reign on earth, Jesus must destroy all who continue to oppose Him.
 - The battle of Armageddon was already touched on briefly in [16:12-16](#).
 - This is probably more of a war than a single battle with [19:11-21](#) being the final battle.
 - Some other passages that may be about other battles/events of this war: [Daniel 11:40-45](#) (Egypt, Libya, & Cush in Northern Africa, Edom, Moab & Ammon South & East of Israel), [Isaiah 34](#) (Edom), [Isaiah 17](#) (Damascus/Aram which is Syria North of Israel)
 - It sounds like there is an Internal conflict within the Beast's empire, but when Jesus shows up they all forget their differences and unite to fight Him.
- ([11-16](#)) The rider on the white horse:
 - In the ancient Middle East, when a king came on a horse, it often meant he was riding to war (as opposed to when he would arrive on a donkey in time of peace).
 - Jesus' second coming emphasizes his holiness, righteousness, and authority.
 - The first time, He came as a lamb to die for all.
 - This time He comes as conquering King and righteous judge, exercising the universal Lordship which is his by right, and punishing those who continue in rebellion despite the offer of forgiveness and salvation.
- He is referred to by a variety of names:
 - Faithful & true – he keeps His promises, setting up the Kingdom for his people and destroying evil from off the earth.
 - An unknown name – He is God and some things about Him are beyond us.
 - The Word of God – see [John 1:1-18](#)

- King of Kings and Lord of Lords – The only one who has the right to be supreme ruler over all things (*crowns*: διαδεματα/kingly crowns, not στεφανοι/victory crowns).
- Some additional descriptions of his return:
 - [Zechariah 14:3-4](#) – He will come back to the mount of Olives (which is where he left from [Acts 1:1-12](#)).
 - Matthew 24:27-31 – It will be highly visible and accompanied by cosmic disturbances.
- Being on the right side will be awe-inspiring and on the wrong side terrifying.

(17-21) The Battle of Armageddon

- [\(17-18\)](#) A massive number of people will be slain.
 - This provides a different kind of feast for the carrion birds.
 - In punishment for rebellion there is no distinction based on class. The rich and powerful who often seem to escape justice are judged by the same standard as everyone else.
- [\(19-21\)](#) The battle is no contest.
 - It is unclear whether the armies of heaven engage in the early stages of fighting or not (though it seems unlikely).
 - Satan's two masterpieces are captured alive and thrown into the lake of fire (a different place than hades where the unsaved dead currently reside).
 - Everyone left after the capture of the Beast and False Prophet dies at Jesus' Word.
 - It is unclear whether this is everyone in the army or every unsaved person on earth, but it is probably just the army.
 - It appears that that the unsaved not in the army are then rounded up, judged, and executed in a separate set of judgment ([Zechariah 14:12-15](#), [Ezekiel 20:32-38](#), [Matthew 13:40-43](#), [25:34-46](#)).

Conclusion

- The Kingdom is coming, and when it's here we are going to have the best celebration ever!
 - Even though it's not here yet, we can rejoice in the future we have.
 - Christians shouldn't go around with long faces – we are the ones who have hope!
 - Don't give up...it's coming ([II Corinthians 4:8-10...16-18](#)).
- Be sure you are on the right side.

20:1-10 – Your Kingdom Come

The Millennial Kingdom

Introduction

- This next passage is on the Millennial Kingdom.
 - o The nature of the Millennial Kingdom has long been a hotly debated topic.
 - o When taken literally, it is meant as an encouragement to faith and perseverance: this is what is coming!

- Amillennial view: There is no literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. Instead, we are currently living in the Kingdom as Jesus Christ is ruling and reigning spiritually in our hearts.
 - o This view was influenced to some extent by Platonism which rejects anything physical as evil (so the thought of a physical paradise on earth is “unholy” or “worldly”).
 - o It was also influenced by a misunderstanding in which some thought that those who believed in a Millennium were limiting God’s eternal Kingdom to 1,000 years.
 - o It requires “spiritualizing” a huge number of promises and prophecies.
 - o Amillennialism is probably the most widely held position today.

- Post-Millennial view: Things on earth will continue to get better and better as Christianity has more and more influence on society until we usher in the Kingdom of peace and prosperity. After a length of time (which may or may not be literally 1,000 years) Jesus returns.
 - o This requires that the events of chapter 20 do not actually follow those of chapter 19 and the “spiritualizing” of many events and promises described here and elsewhere.
 - o Post-Millennialism fell out of favor after WWI and even more so after WWII.
 - o A form of it is currently being revived in some parts of the “Emergent Church” movement with its focus on “social justice.”

- Pre-Millennial view: Jesus Christ returns to earth at the final battle of Armageddon, the wicked are judged, and he sets up his perfect Kingdom on earth for 1,000 years where he reigns over all the earth from David’s throne in Jerusalem.
 - o This fulfills many OT prophecies, especially those relating to Israel (e.g. [Jeremiah 23:5-6](#)).
 - o It is the most straightforward reading of Scripture.
 - o It explains the differences between some Kingdom passages in the OT and the eternal state described in Revelation 21-22 (i.e. God’s kingdom has two distinct “phases”).

(1-3) Satan Bound

- This is a huge problem for the amillennial & post-millennial positions.
 - o Amillennial problem: Satan is still very active on earth ([II Corinthians 4:3-4](#), [I Peter 5:8](#)).
 - o Post-millennialism: requires massively allegorical interpretation to recast the binding of Satan as social reform (to say nothing of wishful thinking about society getting better).
 - o I won’t bother with any other amil/postmil refutation for sake of time, but I think their problems are fairly obvious unless you are okay with allegorizing Scripture.

- Satan has no influence on the world for 1,000 years.
 - o With the fall of Babylon, the old world system is done away with, and now the author of that system is imprisoned so that his influence is done away with.
 - o Objection: obviously it's metaphorical since you can't bind a spirit with a physical chain.
 - The Bible does speak of other wicked angels imprisoned in chains ([II Peter 2:4](#), [Jude 6](#)). God can imprison and restrain spirit being whether the chain used is exactly what we would think of as a chain or not.
 - Even if it is purely a metaphor, you can't give it any meaning you want. The point is clearly spelled out in v. [3](#): he can no longer deceive the nations/people.
 - o At the end of 1,000 years Satan will be briefly released (more on that in below).

[\(4-6\) The Thousand Years](#)

[\(4a\) Various Judgments as the Kingdom Is Established](#)

- Who are on the thrones judging alongside Jesus?
 - o Possibly the 24 elders ([Revelation 4:4](#))
 - o Possibly the 12 disciples ([Luke 22:29-30](#))
 - o Possibly the saved of all ages ([Revelation 22:5](#))
- Who are they judging?
 - o Jews who are still alive after the great tribulation ([Ezekiel 20:33-38](#))
 - The vast majority will have turned to Christ at his coming ([Zechariah 12:10-14](#)).
 - Apparently, a few will continue to rebel and be executed ([38](#)).
 - o Gentiles who are still alive after the great tribulation ([Matthew 25:31-46](#))
 - This is known as "The sheep and the goat judgment."
 - Their conduct toward Jews and Christians will have demonstrated where their allegiance was (i.e. whether they were truly saved or not).
 - The saved enter the Kingdom and the unsaved are executed.

[\(4b-6\) Martyred Tribulation Saints Are Resurrected](#)

- But aren't they already in heaven with God?
 - o Resurrection reunites body and soul/spirit.
 - o We were created with a physical part and a spiritual part and the physical universe was created for us to enjoy. Your body is a part of you!
 - o The resurrection body is different and perfect, but still a body (like Jesus' body after his resurrection)
- This is described as "the first resurrection" even though there have already been resurrections of Jesus, various OT saints, and all church-age Christians.
 - o This may be considered another phase of that same resurrection...
 - o ...and/or it is contrasting the first kind of resurrection (that of the saved) with the second kind (that of the wicked) which will occur at the end of the Millennium.

- Some place the resurrection of the OT saints here rather than at the rapture.
 - o The reason for this is that the rapture describes the resurrection of those “in Christ” which some take as a term that can only be applied to the church.
 - o Since only the tribulation saints are specifically mentioned here, I lean toward the OT saints being raised at the rapture (they too are saved by Christ).

Conditions on Earth During the Millennium (A Sampling of Old Testament Passages)

- [Micah 4:1-4](#)
 - o Jerusalem will be the center of world government where all disputes are settled righteously and without warfare.
 - o People can live in confident safety.

- [Isaiah 11:1-11](#)
 - o (1-5) Jesus will rule with perfect righteousness and any rebellion will be dealt with immediately.
 - o (6-9) Nature will become peaceable and vegetarian rather than hostile and dangerous.
 - o (10-11) Israel will be regathered to their land from all over the world.

- [Isaiah 65:19-23](#)
 - o (19-20) There will still be birth and death.
 - This would be from those who survived the tribulation and entered the kingdom in their natural bodies, not from us who have already received glorified bodies.
 - Lifespans will be increased. Maybe the only death is execution of the rebellious.
 - We can assume that at some point Millennial Kingdom believers will receive resurrection bodies (after the final rebellion?), but we are not given details.
 - o (21-23) Life will be fulfilling rather than frustrating and painful.

- [Ezekiel 40-48](#) – There will be a new temple.
 - o Services will be as a memorial since Jesus has already died as the perfect sacrifice.
 - o This is different from the eternal state in which there is no temple ([Revelation 21:22](#)).

[\(7-10\) The Final Rebellion](#)

- [\(7-8\)](#) Satan will be allowed to go free and deceive people into rebelling against Jesus Christ.
 - o Why? (a question that seldom has a concrete answer spelled out for us)
 - Possibly so that those born during the Millennium have the opportunity to decide whether they truly side with Jesus or not.
 - Possibly to demonstrate that even under perfect utopian conditions the human heart can rebel against God. Our big problem is our nature not our environment.

- Satan succeeds in deceiving a vast number of people (“as the sands of the sea”).
 - These would have to be the descendants (great-great-great... grandchildren?) of those who survived the tribulation and entered the Millennial Kingdom.
 - Some have apparently been outwardly conforming while inwardly rebelling. Going through the motions and saying the right thing because you feel it is your duty does not make you truly saved.
- What is “Gog and Magog”?
 - First mentioned in [Ezekiel 38-39](#) where it appears to be about Russia as the leader of an anti-Israel coalition that is miraculously defeated by God. However, that appears to be a different war since its aftermath is significantly different.
 - Some possible options:
 - Maybe this refers to this battle with the same name to show that it is a similar rebellion or equally hopeless (e.g. how we might use *Waterloo*).
 - Maybe Russia is a major player again.
- [\(9\)](#) The battle itself is no contest.
 - A vast army surrounds Jerusalem (“The beloved city” and “camp of the saints”).
 - They are wiped out with fire from heaven.
- [\(10\)](#) Satan is once and for all thrown into the lake of fire.
 - The lake of fire is the place of eternal suffering, as opposed to Sheol/Hades (often translated “hell”) which is where the unsaved go to await their final judgment.
 - This is Satan’s ultimate punishment.
 - He is not being confined or exiled to a smaller less-impressive kingdom (like the Greek god Hades or Milton’s “better to reign in hell than serve in heaven”).
 - He doesn’t get what he wanted in any sense of the word. He loses everything.
 - He is not enjoying himself. He is being tormented for all of eternity (the penalty for unrepentant rebellion against the eternal God).

Conclusion

- Don’t forget the sobering lessons of the Millennium.
 - Improved living conditions (even bordering-on-perfect ones) do not in and of themselves change people’s hearts.
 - Showing God’s love through helping relieve physical suffering is important ([James 1:27](#)).
 - However, “social justice” must never become our only/primary focus.
 - Doing and saying all the right things is not enough.
 - Have you truly asked God to forgive your sins and trusted Jesus to save you?
 - See [Matthew 7:21-23](#), [John 6:28-29](#)

- Just imagine what it will be like to live in the Millennial Kingdom (and this isn't even eternity yet).
 - o Things that are not there:
 - No Satan to spread sin, suffering and discord
 - No world system dedicated to sinful pleasures and rejection of God
 - For us, no sin nature (no inclination or possibility to sin)
 - No unfairness in settling disputes
 - No warfare
 - o What will be there:
 - Jesus Christ himself visibly, physically at the center of it all (government, worship, culture)
 - Working alongside Jesus in positions of authority (I would have to imagine doing things we enjoy – [Matthew 25:34](#) – “...the kingdom prepared for you...”)
 - Righteous deeds openly rewarded and the godly are the ones who are looked up to ([Daniel 12:2-3](#) – shine as the stars of heaven).
 - Nature in harmony, producing plenty and free of violence and fear

- Next: Eternity (Things get even better for God's children!)

20:11-21:8 – New Beginning

The Great White Throne & The New Heaven and Earth

[\(20:11-15\)](#) *The Great White Throne*

- [\(11\)](#) The one seated on the great white throne:
 - o He has the right to exercise authority over all things and does so with perfect righteousness.
 - Many people have a hard time with accepting the idea of God’s judgment and eternal punishment and come up with arguments of why “it’s not fair.”
 - [Isaiah 55:6-9](#) gives us two things to remember in this regard:
 - God *has* mercifully provided a way of forgiveness that cost him dearly (but it is a “limited time offer”).
 - It is the height of arrogance to assume that we know better than God what is right, fair, and good – his thoughts and ways are beyond us.
 - We must trust the goodness and truth of what he has revealed, even though we cannot fully understand it. He is God and we are not.
 - o The old universe (even the restored Millennial Kingdom version of it) is completely done away with ([II Peter 3:10-13](#)).
 - It will be destroyed by fire/burning/melting and be revealed for what it is.
 - Given that everything physical in this world is temporary, our focus should be on holy living and looking forward to the eternal new heaven and earth.
- [\(12-15\)](#) The dead are judged (the final purging of evil).
 - o Those who did not participate in the first resurrection ([6](#)) are now raised to be judged.
 - Their soul is taken from hades and reunited with a body that will last forever.
 - They are judged regardless of their social standing ([12a](#)) and regardless of where their bodies went after they died ([13](#)).
 - o First, they are judged by what they did in life (the content of the books).
 - No one can measure up to God’s perfect standard on their own ([Romans 3:23](#)).
 - Degrees of eternal punishment are implied (e.g. [Matthew 11:21-24](#)).
 - o Then, they are eternally separated from God in the lake of fire.
 - This is because their names are not found in the Lamb’s book of life which records the names of all the saved (e.g. [Philippians 4:3](#), [Revelation 13:8](#), [17:8](#)).
 - There is no reason to see this as anything other than literal physical punishment and separation from all that is good that lasts forever.
 - This is very sobering and should motivate us to witness ([Romans 10:13-15](#)).
 - o This is also the end of death (separation of body and soul) and hades (place where the dead are imprisoned).
 - They were not part of the original creation and now they are done away with.
 - Never again will anyone die. We will never again be separated from someone because their spirit has gone where we cannot yet go.
 - The eternal destiny of everyone you meet will be secure.

(21:1-8) The New Heaven & Earth

- (1-3) The universe that had been touched by sin and death is replaced with a new perfect one.
 - The current universe is running down ([Romans 8:18-24](#) and the law of entropy).
 - It is unclear how closely it will resemble the old one as heaven and earth become one.
 - The sea as it currently exists will not be part of the new earth.
 - Much of our seawater is probably “left over” from the great flood, so any bodies of water on the new earth may be very different in nature and size.
 - Some have suggested this is referring only to how the sea is symbolically of wicked, seething nations throughout the whole rest of the book of Revelation (Chapters 13 & 17 – especially [17:15](#)).
 - Our resurrection body bears close resemblance to our old one but with immortality and increased power, glory, and spirituality (*cf.* Jesus’ resurrected body & [I Corinthians 15:42-44](#)), so the new heavens and earth is probably also similar-but-improved.
 - Our original purpose included living in and ruling over a physical universe ([Genesis 1:28](#)). Surely Satan has not thwarted God’s purpose.
 - The dwelling place of God is no longer somewhere that we cannot see or go in our physical bodies, but is New Jerusalem: the centerpiece of this new universe.
- (4) Nothing brought into the world by sin will remain:
 - No death
 - No grief or sad crying – nothing that makes you sad will ever happen again.
 - No pain – nothing will ever hurt again.
 - It is hard to imagine even *one* day without these things, let alone an infinite number of such days.
- (5-7) Heaven isn’t just about bad things being gone – God Himself will be with us.
 - This is the goal toward which all human history was headed (the Alpha and Omega – “When the times reach their fulfillment” – [Ephesians 1:10](#) and context).
 - Every good thing we ever thirsted for will be satisfied.
 - That includes the times we looked around this broken world and longed for something better.
 - “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” –C. S. Lewis
 - We will have perfect fellowship with our Heavenly Father.
 - There will be no fear, shame, or guilt because we will be perfectly like Christ ([I John 3:1-2](#)). That process of “being conformed to the image of his Son” ([Romans 8:28-29](#)) will be complete.
 - We will be able to see with our eyes the Father in His glory and spend time in person with our Lord Jesus Christ.

- (8) There will be no sinners there
 - This is both a sobering reminder to share our faith and an encouragement for the future.
 - We will be completely free from sin: it will not appeal to us...anything you want to do will be something that is good and acceptable for you to do.
 - The same will be true of everyone we meet:
 - No more wondering if you can trust someone or if they're taking advantage of you
 - No more worrying that people are talking about you behind your back
 - No more someone who is jealous or on a power trip hindering or interfering with your expressing joy, creativity, or service to God
 - No more having someone sin against you in any way

Conclusion

- We are not missing out on “the good life” if we live godly lives. Rebellion against God does not ultimately achieve anything.
 - Unrepentant guilt-free sin may indicate you have never truly trusted in Jesus to save you ([1 John 3:8-10](#)).
 - If you are saved, sin is a waste of time. It hinders your fellowship with God now and probably means fewer eternal rewards later.
 - Keep in mind that the physical things of this world are all temporary.
- Eternal physical punishment is very real
 - Make sure your faith is in the right place (not “I do all this great stuff for Jesus” but “I trust Jesus death and resurrection to get me into heaven” – [Matthew 7:21-23](#), [John 6:28-29](#)).
 - Share the Gospel with others!
- Eternal life is going to be awesome!
 - We get a brand-new universe.
 - Nothing connected to sin will exist any longer.
 - We will have perfect fellowship with our God and Savior.
 - Next: a physical description of the New Jerusalem & some misconceptions that people have about heaven/eternity

21:9-22:5 – Finally Home

The New Jerusalem

Introduction

- The focus is on the New Jerusalem – The “centerpiece” of the New Universe (the part of the New Heaven and New Earth that people have in mind when they refer to “heaven”).
- Many pastors and theologians regard the details of this passage as purely symbolic.
 - o They claim that the idea is merely to portray glory, splendor and refreshment (and often hint that it is childish/naïve to take things like streets of gold literally).
 - o While many of the details are difficult to picture with what we know of this current earth, nothing in the passage indicates that the details are meant to be purely symbolic ([21:17](#) even points out that these are real human measurements).

(21:9-22) The Outside of the City

- ([9-11](#)) It is described as a radiant bride.
 - o Some suggest “bride/wife of the lamb” means that only church-age saints get to live in New Jerusalem.
 - The focused is on the church because this book is written to churches, but that does not mean that believers of other eras have no part in New Jerusalem.
 - Husband/wife language is also used of God and Israel in the OT ([Isaiah 54:5](#)).
 - [Hebrews 11:10, 16](#) – New Jerusalem is the fulfillment of the promises to and desires of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - o The emphasis is on radiance, joy, and fellowship, not the exclusion of certain people.
 - o The presence and glory of God makes the city shine through its walls of jasper (not the same thing we call jasper since it is clear as crystal).
- ([12-14](#)) The walls, gates, and foundations:
 - o ([12a](#)) A wall made of jasper/crystal may be simply to heighten the beauty, but may also symbolize the fact that some may not enter (i.e. the unsaved).
 - o ([12b-13](#)) Each wall has 3 gates, each inscribed with the names of one of the 12 tribes of Israel and attended by an angel.
 - This is much like the Israelites camping around the tabernacle where the presence of God dwelt ([Numbers 2](#)). It is quite possible that the gates are arranged in the same order.
 - This is a further indication that the New Jerusalem is home to OT Jewish believers as well as church-age Christians.
 - God has worked through Israel as his chosen nation throughout history (particularly the Old Testament, the tribulation, & the Millennium) and he continues to honor them in eternity.
 - Angels now welcome people rather than guarding the way to the tree of life.

- (14) Under the walls are 12 foundations, inscribed with the names of the 12 apostles.
 - This is an appropriate honor since as Jesus' personal representatives they are the figurative foundation of the church ([Ephesians 2:20](#)).
 - Who is the 12th? It is either Matthias who officially replaced Judas ([Acts 1:12-26](#)), or Paul who was appointed by God as apostle to the Gentiles ([Galatians 1](#)).
 - Perhaps eternal rewards include other monuments honoring the faithful service of others as well (Martin Luther? William Tyndale?).

- (15-17) The size of the city:
 - The dimensions are approximately 1,380 mi X 1,380 mi X 1,380 mi (1 Stadia = ~607ft).
 - It is usually portrayed as a cube, but a pyramid might also be possible (with the throne of God at the apex and the river of life flowing down).
 - Current earth's atmosphere is only ~300 miles high, and we can only breathe well in the lowest 5 miles or so, so there are *major* differences in the new earth's atmosphere and/or size and/or physic and/or our new bodies.
 - A city that size would cover most of the modern Middle East or Mediterranean Sea.
 - "No more sea" ([21:1](#)) may indicate a lot more land even if New Earth is the same size as current earth.
 - It is also possible that it floats over New Earth rather than "landing."
 - The walls are ~216 feet thick (1 cubit = ~1½ feet).
 - It could be height instead of thickness (in Greek, John does not specify which).
 - I think that thickness makes more sense, given that the city is 1,380 *miles* high.
 - John makes it clear that he is referring to *literal* human measurements even though the measuring reed came from the angel.

- (18-21) The beauty of the city:
 - (18) The walls are of jasper/crystal and the city itself of transparent gold.
 - Currently, gold is only transparent when spread *very* thinly (e.g. visors of space helmets) so this is either a "new version" of gold or a new way of crafting gold.
 - Imagine the glory of God shining out reflected/refracted through the whole city.
 - (19-20) The foundations are decorated with precious stones (Some are difficult to identify because precious stones have not always been classified under the same name).
 - 1 – jasper (obviously not our jasper...more like crystal or diamond)
 - 2 – Sapphire – transparent deep blue
 - 3 – Chalcedony/Agate – wide variety of opaque colors...tend to be red/orange/brown/white
 - 4 – Emerald – transparent dark green
 - 5 – Sardonyx/onyx – variety of colors, but usually black
 - 6 – Sardius/Carnelian– variety of red and white stones (or possibly Ruby - transparent red gem)
 - 7 – Chrysolite – wide variety, but in the ancient world tended to be yellow/gold

- 8 – Beryl – wide variety of colors, but tend toward aquamarine
- 9 – Topaz – variety of transparent colors, but tend toward brown
- 10 – Chrysoprase – opaque sea green (or turquoise)
- 11 – Jacinth – variety of transparent colors, but tend toward orange
- 12 – Amethyst – usually transparent purple
- The glory of God shining through the gold and crystal further reflects off these stones and the gates.
- (21) Each gate is a huge pearl (not pearl studded gold like in cartoons).
- (22) The streets are of transparent gold (as already described above).

(21:22-22:2) *The Inside of the City and Its Inhabitants*

- (22) There is no temple.
 - God is there in person in all his glory.
 - This is a difference from the Millennium where there was still a temple (God the Son was visibly, physically present, but not all three persons in their full glory).
 - God can be approached directly.
 - We have the privilege of coming straight to God now in prayer ([Hebrews 4:16](#)).
 - Then, we will be able to talk with and see God in all his glory and converse with Jesus face to face!
 - Maybe sometimes Jesus will even come seek you out individually!
- (23) There is no need for the sun and moon in the city.
 - The glory of God is the light source for the city.
 - This doesn't necessarily mean that there are no sun and moon in the new universe, but in New Jerusalem they are unnecessary.
 - Their light would be totally overwhelmed like how you can't see the stars in daylight.
- (24-27) People will freely come and go to worship God and bring him glory.
 - (24) People will probably still identify themselves by nationality (though the word *nations* can also simply mean *Gentiles*).
 - If this is the case, it will be without racism, wars, international squabbles, etc.
 - Perhaps we will preserve the good aspects of each culture (dress, food, music styles, etc.). God loves diversity.
 - Perhaps the kings of the nations are those in positions of high authority due to faithful service (cf. [Matthew 25:23](#) – “put you in charge of many things,” [Luke 19:17](#) – “take charge of ten cities”).
 - (25) The gates are always open.
 - The New Jerusalem is a completely secure place with no threats of any kind.
 - Anyone who is not allowed to enter has already been cast into the lake of fire.
 - The angels at the gates must serve more as guides or greeters than as guards.
 - (27) There is never going to be a second rebellion. Eternity is secure.

- (1) A crystal-clear river flows out from the throne of God and down the middle of the main street.
 - o It is a literal river, but reminder us of spiritual truths (like my wedding ring is a real ring, but stands for love, fidelity, etc.).
 - o It reminds us of refreshment and quenching of spiritual thirst (cf. [John 4:10-14](#)) and of purity (“pure as a mountain stream”).

- (2) The tree of life is restored to us.
 - o In [Genesis 3:22-24](#) Adam and Eve were barred from it because it would have prevented them from physically dying, but now it is in New Jerusalem.
 - o It is either a huge tree that spans the river and street or groves of the same kind of tree.
 - o Some suggest Eden is moved or recreated in New Jerusalem as sort of a “Central Park” along the main avenue.
 - o It provides 12 crops of fruit (either 12 different kinds of fruit or, more likely a new crop every month) and apparently has edible leaves (tea?).
 - *Healing* can be better translated as *health* (since there is no more sickness or pain in the New Heaven & Earth).
 - Its fruit and leaves promote the enjoyment of heaven and living life to the full.

[\(3-5\) A Summary](#)

- The curse ([Genesis 3:14-19](#)) is gone.
 - o Nature is not running down.
 - o Work is not difficult and unpleasant (no weeds or thorns).
 - o There is no more conflict (either between people or between Satan and people).
 - o There is no more death.

- There is perfect face-to-face fellowship with the Almighty All-loving God of the Universe!

- The glory of God will continually stream out through the universe from his dwelling in New Jerusalem as he and his saints reign forever.

[Conclusion](#)

- No “this is how you should live” application for this section.

- Just try to imagine what our true home will be like, and realize that what God has revealed is only a small taste of the unimaginable glory of eternity ([1 Corinthians 2:9-10](#), [Ephesians 3:20-21](#)).

Revelation 22:6-21 – I Am Coming Quickly

Introduction/Review

- We've covered all the major events of the book of Revelation:
 - o Letters to 7 churches focusing on holiness, faithfulness, and service
 - o The 7 worst years of human history
 - 3 series of 7 major judgments from God
 - Terrible persecution of Jews and believers (but many people saved)
 - o The second coming of Christ
 - The battle of Armageddon
 - The death of all who are unsaved
 - o The Millennial Kingdom
 - 1,000 years of complete peace in a nearly perfect world with no influence from Satan and Jesus visibly, physically reigning from Jerusalem
 - It ends with a final rebellion led by Satan and the final judgment of all unsaved people at the Great White throne.
 - o The Eternal Kingdom
 - God creates a New Heaven and New Earth with New Jerusalem, his dwelling place, coming down to earth.
 - Heaven and earth become one and we get to live in that perfect universe for all of eternity.

- These last few verses are a Wrap-up with final promises and admonitions.

(6-7) The Timing

- God's messenger, emphasizes the truthfulness of the prophecies and promises of this book.

- In what sense is it "quickly" or "soon" since it has been 1,900+ years since this was written?
 - o *Quickly* could be focusing on the fact that Jesus' return will happen quickly and unexpectedly ("in the twinkling of an eye" – [1 Corinthians 15:52](#)).
 - In some ways, this seems like the easiest answer because it requires the least amount of explaining.
 - It may not be the best answer since the emphasis seems to be on expectancy (both here and elsewhere in the NT).
 - o It could be *soon* in the sense that God relates differently to time than we do (II Peter 3:8), and 1,900+ years is a drop in the bucket compared to eternity.
 - o It could be *quickly/soon* in the sense of "it could happen at any moment."
 - i.e. There is nothing else that must happen before the rapture takes place and kicks off the events of chapters 4-22.
 - A small sampling of verses that offer a sense of expectancy: [Luke 12:40](#), [Philippians 3:20](#), [James 5:8-9](#).

- There is a special blessing for those who pay attention to the teachings of Revelation.
 - o This is similar to the blessing from [1:3](#).

- The book of Revelation should affect our lives.
 - It should challenge us to holiness, service, and faithfulness as Jesus challenges the seven churches in chapters 2-3.
 - It should increase our awe and reverence for our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
 - It should help us to carry on without growing discouraged because glorious eternity is coming.

(8-9) Another Misunderstanding

- John is so overwhelmed that he tries to worship the angel, just like he did in [19:10](#).
- He is again reminded that angels are our fellow-servants.
 - There are occasional glimpses in the Bible that show angelic intervention going on behind the scenes, unsuspected by humans (e.g. [II Kings 6:15-17](#), [Daniel 10:10-14](#)).
 - Adoration or prayers for help/guidance/protection must be directed to God alone. Anything else is idolatry.

(10-17) The Eternal Consequences of the Second Coming

- [\(10\)](#) We are given another warning that the second coming could happen at any time, and this book helps us be ready for that time.
- [\(11-13\)](#) Eventually, present choices become permanent in character.
 - [\(11a\)](#) Those who are wicked and filthy will continue that way.
 - A wicked filthy heart will produce wicked filthy deeds (unless changed by God at salvation).
 - Once Christ returns it is too late to ever change.
 - [\(11b\)](#) Those who are holy and righteous in Christ will do holy and righteous deeds.
 - This is “putting on the new self” ([Ephesians 3-4](#)).
 - Once Christ returns we won’t have any inclination to do otherwise ([I John 3:2](#)).
 - [\(12\)](#) Our deeds determine our eternal rewards.
 - For the unsaved, they appear to determine severity of punishment.
 - For the saved, the good deeds (bad ones are forgiven/forgotten) determine privilege and position (and who knows what else) in eternity ([Luke 19:12-19](#)).
 - [\(13\)](#) All of human history is building to this point, summed up in the person of Jesus Christ: what He did for us, whether we trusted Him to save us, what we did for Him once we were saved, and what He will do for us for all of eternity ([Ephesians 1:3-10](#)).
- [\(14-15\)](#) Only some will enter the Kingdom.
 - It is only those who have been made pure (“washed their robes”) that will participate in the blessings of New Jerusalem.
 - All others are forever excluded and continue in their sin for eternity.
 - Cleansing from sin comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone, independent of good works ([Titus 3:5-7](#)).
 - Note: The KJV and NKJV say that entrance into the blessings of the New Jerusalem are for those who “do his commandments.”

- This can easily be understood as salvation by works.
 - These two translations are based on a few relatively recent Greek manuscripts (no earlier than 10th century) that in this verse contradict all known ancient manuscripts, translations, and quotations from the 3rd-9th centuries.
- (16) Jesus solemnly declares that this is the truth.
 - He emphasizes his position as Messiah: the source and the descendant of King David.
 - He emphasizes his glory: He is God himself.
 - The book of Revelation is a message straight from Jesus to the local church. We cannot ignore it or try to explain it away.
- (17) The offer of salvation is extended to all.
 - We (the bride and the one who hears) are responsible to work with the Holy Spirit in inviting others to be citizens of the perfect eternal Kingdom of God.
 - Salvation, the water of life, is offered as a free gift. Jesus already paid for it with his life so he can offer it to anyone who is willing to accept it.

(18-19) A Solemn Warning

- Purposely adding to or taking away from the things written in this book brings God's judgment.
 - Being under the plagues in this book and losing the right to the tree of life and New Jerusalem indicates that that person is not saved .
 - KJV "Book of life" is incorrect as it appears in no known Greek manuscript.
 - It probably comes from a defective copy of a Latin translation.
 - In Latin *tree (ligno)* and *book (libro)* are fairly similar so this is probably the result of a copyist's error.
- Adding and taking away refers to deliberately altering the text and/or denying that the things taught in this book are true (second coming, final judgment, eternal punishment, eternal Kingdom, etc.).
 - To do so is to call Jesus a liar, and such actions are the fruit of an unsaved heart ([John 8:43-45](#)).
 - Accidentally copying a verse wrong or disagreeing with other Christians on details and timing of events does not seem to be what is in mind here.

(20-21) Conclusion: Jesus Is Coming!

- Make sure that you have trusted in Jesus Christ to forgive your sins and save you.
- Share the Gospel with others as God gives you the opportunity.
- Stand firm in your faith; this broken world with all its injustice and antagonism is temporary.
- Look forward to Christ's return with eagerness. He is coming to reward us for faithful service and take us to our glorious eternal home where we will live with him forever.

Bibliography

- Aland, Barbara, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carol M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, . 2001. *The Greek New Testament*. 4th. Munster: United Bible Societies.
- Alcorn, Randy. 2004. *Heaven*. Carol Spring: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
- Benware, Paul N. 2006. *Understanding End Times Prophecy*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Holmes, Michael W., ed. 1999. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*. 2nd. Translated by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Stallard, Mike. 2007. "Class Notes for Exposition of Daniel & Revelation." Clarks Summit: Baptist Bible Seminary.
- Walvoord, John F. 2000. *Revelation*. Vol. New Testament, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 925-991. Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries.
- . 1989. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.