

Lessons from Revelation

Student Workbook

Name _____

Prepared By:
Orville Vaughn
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Lessons from Revelation

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Preface

The book of Revelation causes people to think and act in extremes. On one extreme are those who do not wish to study the book at all. They claim it has no direct bearing on our salvation today, is very difficult to understand and is best left alone. On the other extreme are those who find it quite easy to interpret the book (this seems to happen often with those who are young and immature in the faith) and gleefully run through its pages proclaiming with great confidence the meaning of images, symbols, and numbers. Most of their “explanations” are quite superficial containing little depth, reasoning or thought. Both of these extremes are dangerous and can cause great harm to souls seeking to understand God’s truth. But such is the world we live in today.

So, it is with much trepidation that I join the masses who have expounded on this final prophetic book in God’s Holy Word. However, unlike many before me, as I take pen in hand I confess my limitations. I boldly state that there is much I do not understand about the images and symbols in this marvelous book. Well into my sixth decade on earth I understand very well the adage: “the older I get and the more I study the more I realize how little I truly know.” God’s word is humbling. It causes the serious student to marvel and bow down to One whose intelligence is much higher (Isaiah 58...). This is not a book authored by a man. It is a divine book authored by the the supreme being. It should be no wonder when we fail to grasp all of it.

So then Orville, why write your thoughts at all, if you confess there is much you do not know about the book? This is a fair question and my answer is two-fold:

1. I do not think one need know everything about a subject before he speaks on it. If this were the case, not many sermons could be preached on great portions of God’s Word. However, it is important that the author knows enough about the subject to truly teach and instruct others. While my knowledge may be limited, I do believe I understand the primary theme and common sub-themes found in the book.
2. I believe there is a need for a basic overview of the book of Revelation contained in 13 brief lessons. This type of study can provide every Christian with a good understanding of the theme of Revelation and, more importantly, equip them to answer those who would use the images in the book to teach false doctrines and lead some astray.

Orville Vaughn
White Bear Lake, Minnesota
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Prelude

Picture in your mind a small, rocky island. It is no more than 10 miles long and 6 miles wide at its widest point. It is mostly uninhabited and very uninviting. Nothing can grow there due to all of the rocks. It is used as a penal colony. The few prisoners there do not need to be guarded very closely because they cannot escape. It is 24 miles to the nearest land over open water. This is a desolate and lonely place.

On this island is an elderly man who is a little stooped with age and weary from years of labor. As a young man he was a fisherman but for the last 40 years or so his labors have not been so physical but much more strenuous. He has been banished to this island not for being a thief or a murderer. He is guilty of no such crime. He is being punished because he is a Christian and he will not deny His God. He prays often. He understands that he may face an excruciating death as has many of his companions, and he is ready for that. But that will not be his fate. He will not die on this island. He will be released and return to the main-lands because his God has other work for him. But today, he does not know this.

The day is the first day of the week, a day of special significance to all Christians. Although separated from his companions and longing for them, he is not alone. One appears to him and he is told to write the things he sees and hears. And so he does. And, what the Apostle John wrote, we hold in our hands today roughly 2000 years later. It is the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

It is God's final chapter in His glorious book to His creation. It brings to a close all of the events of the current age and offers a glimpse (or window) into the world to come. It is both frightening and inspiring. It is mysterious and glorious. Filled with dragons and beasts and images difficult for John to describe and equally difficult for us to understand. It is a book ignored by some because it is difficult to grasp and explain while others, with little regard for the rest of God's Word, choose to take the numbers and images and symbols and make them mean pretty much whatever they want.

What are we, in the 21st century of our Lord, to do with the book of Revelation?

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Revelation

Lesson One

The Apocalypse or Unveiling

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will setup a kingdom which will never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”

Daniel 2:44

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the central message of the opening chapter.

Text:

Revelation 1

Introduction

In the opening chapter of this remarkable book much is happening. Jesus is revealing things that must shortly take place through the “disciple whom He loved,” John. He speaks through John to “seven churches” in Asia although we know there were more than seven churches in Asia. This is an indication of how numbers will be used throughout the book. They will be used frequently and they will be symbolic. The number seven will be used fifty-four times in the book of Revelation.

In His opening remarks, Jesus establishes his authority for authoring this book. He is:

- The faithful witness (vs. 5)
- Resurrected – “the firstborn from the dead” (vs. 5)
- Redeemer – “who loved us and washed us from our sins” (vs. 5)
- Ruler – “the ruler over the kings of the earth” (vs. 5)
- Judge – “behold He is coming with clouds” (vs. 7)
- “And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” (vs. 18)

In this first chapter, John also introduces visions (vs. 10) as the means through which God would reveal these things to His people. This is consistent with the apocalyptic books of the Old Testament: Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah (see Ezekiel 8:3). We would do well, when confronted with all of the images in this book, to remember that John is describing a vision and not something literal (similar to the visions sent to Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah). In fact, many of the images found in Revelation are identical to images found in the Old Testament apocalyptic books.

Note in verse nine that John describes himself as “*your brother and companion in the tribulation.*” Some would suggest that the tribulation is

something yet to come but John stated that he was he in it then. The tribulation he was experiencing was real and immediate. As much as we want to make most of the symbols in the book apply to modern times, we must always be aware, that what John was writing also had to make sense for those of that time. In the first century, the church was under tremendous persecution (re. John being on Patmos) and a primary purpose for this book was to bring comfort and hope to those enduring such suffering. Can it bring similar hope to us today? Absolutely. But the message must also fit within the context of the first century.

Some form of the phrase "*I am the First and the Last*" is repeated three times in this chapter (vs. 8, 11, & 17). This phrase is also found in Isaiah (41:4, 44:6, 48:12) and clearly is used to establish the omnipotence of God. There was none before Him and there will be none after Him. All that follows in this revelation is from the One who has ultimate authority. Let there be no mistake, this is His revelation to His people and to all mankind.

Images used to describe Christ are:

- Clothed in a priestly or royal garment
 - He is King of kings and Lord of lords
- Hair as white as wool and snow
 - Purity and wisdom
- Eyes like a flame of fire
 - Penetrating. He sees all and can see through any façade. We will not fool Him. See also Daniel 10:6.
- Feet like fine brass
 - Strong, stable, enduring foundation (as opposed to feet of clay).
- Voice as the sound of many waters
 - A volume that cannot be ignored. When He speaks it commands attention.
- Seven stars in His right hand.
 - Explained in vs. 20 as His angels or messengers to the churches.
- Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.
 - His words are powerful. They pierce even the soul. See Hebrews 4:12

In verse 18, Christ states that He has "*the keys of Hades and of Death.*" The word Hades literally means "the unseen realm." In the scriptures it represents what lies beyond the grave. Christ says he controls this. He has the keys (authority) over the grave and death. This is consistent with Matthew 28:18 where He said after His resurrection "*all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*" As John is instructed to "*write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this,*" the One guiding him as he writes is the One who is now ruling over heaven and earth. There is no other. We need to listen.

Questions For Discussion

1. We know that God is the divine author of all of His Holy Word but through whom (man) was this message revealed i.e. who wrote the book of Revelation?
2. What else do we know about this man? Did he write any other books in the New Testament?
3. Were there only 7 churches in Asia at this time? Can you name any others in addition to the ones in chapters 2 & 3? Why do you think the letters were written to these 7 churches? Is there any application to us today?
4. How is the number 7 used in scripture? See Genesis 1-2:3; Joshua 6:4; Matthew 18:21-22 (and many others).
5. In what ways does Christ establish His authority for this revelation?
6. What does the phrase *"I am the First and the Last"* mean?
7. What does the word "apocalypse" mean?
8. Besides Revelation, are there other apocalyptic books in the Bible? If so, which other books are apocalyptic?
9. What is the purpose of an apocalyptic book?

10. What does it mean when Christ says He has “*the keys of Hades and Death*”?
See also Matthew 28:18.

Making Application

As you begin this study of Revelation, consider God’s purpose for authoring it and including it at the end of His Holy Scriptures. The following three rules can greatly help you as you study.

- What did the book mean to the people of that day to whom it was written?
- An understanding of the Old Testament prophets (particularly Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah) will help to understand the symbols and signs used in Revelation.
- All interpretations of Revelation must be consistent and harmonious with the remainder of the New Testament. There must be no conflict or contradiction between the two.

Set aside time to truly study this book and not just quickly read over it. The symbols and images may be difficult but they are meant to be understood. Enjoy the treasures found in this final revelation. There will be no other.

Revelation

Lesson Two

The Churches

“Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodecia.”

Colossians 4:16

Lesson Goal:

To gain a good understanding of Christ’s message to the seven churches in Asia and the application for us today.

Text:

Revelation 2 & 3

Introduction

Near the end of chapter one, Christ is seen by John walking among seven lampstands (1:13) and in His right hand were seven stars. In the final verse of the chapter, Christ explains to John the mystery of the seven lampstands and seven stars. *“...the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.”* Now, beginning in chapter two and continuing through chapter three, Christ dictates letters to these seven churches through their angels. The purpose of a lampstand is to hold up the lamp (light). We know that Christ is the *“light of the world”* (John 8:12) so it is evident that a core purpose of His churches is to hold Him up and spread the light in their part of the world. These letters are an evaluation of their (and our) work.

The letters contain praise and hope but also condemnation and warning. The One who has *“eyes like a flame of fire”* sees all and knows all. To every one of the seven churches He says *“I know your works.”* Whether they are praiseworthy or sinful, Christ knows the works of His people, those who wear His name and claim to be His church. Many would like to hide their works from Christ but they cannot. They may be able to hide them from men and, like the church at Sardis *“have a name that you are alive...”* but they cannot hide their works from Christ *“...but you are dead.”* He knows.

There are three phrases found in all of the letters.

- *“I know...”*
- *“He that overcomes...”*
- *“He that has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.”*

In the letters we see five distinct threats facing the churches.

- Paganism (emperor worship in particular)
- Jewish harassment
- Materialism and lawlessness
- Loss of zeal or love
- Being lukewarm

When commenting on understanding Revelation, Jim Echols, one of the elders of the Inver Grove church of Christ, said this: “two things I understand about Revelation: the letters to the churches and judgment.” This is an important statement and realization about the book. While Jim was not saying that he did not understand anything else in Revelation other than the letters to the churches and judgment, he was admitting that these two messages are clear and easy to understand while the remainder of the book with its images and symbolism is a little more challenging. I like to look at the letters and judgment as the bookends of Revelation. On one end, Christ sees us today and is warning and encouraging us in our work. On the other end is the ultimate reward for our work. We must not let the rich imagery (and mysteries) used in much of the book cloud our minds to the crystal clear messages at the beginning and end of the book.

Questions for Discussion

1. Homer Hailey, in his commentary on Revelation, made this statement. “It is interesting and worthwhile to note that each church took on characteristics of the city in which it was located...” What are your thoughts on this statement? Do you think this happens today? If so, in what ways?
2. What praise did Christ give to the church at Ephesus? What were His warnings to them?
3. What praise did Christ give to the church at Smyrna? What were His warnings to them?
4. What praise did Christ give to the church at Pergamos? What were His warnings to them?

5. What praise did Christ give to the church at Thyatira? What were His warnings to them?

6. What praise did Christ give to the church at Sardis? What were His warnings to them?

7. What praise did Christ give to the church at Philadelphia? What were His warnings to them?

8. What praise did Christ give to the church at Laodicea? What were His warnings to them?

9. Do any of the problems in these seven churches exist in churches today?

10. What three things did Christ say to all of the churches?

Making Application

If Christ were writing a letter to your local congregation today, what would He say? For what things would He praise you? For what things would He warn you? Take a few minutes and try to write such a letter following the format Christ used when writing to the churches in Asia: greeting, commendation (if any), condemnation (if any), actions required. Don't be overly critical but also don't be blind to faults or weaknesses. Remember, "*He knows.*"

Revelation

Lesson Three

The Throne Scene

"So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll..."

Revelation 5:4

Lesson Goal:

To attain a good understanding of the images and events described around God's throne.

Text:

Revelation 4 & 5

Introduction

The holy word of God contains amazing stories, images, and people. But throughout all of scripture, you will find no scene so breathtaking, no images so amazing, and no message so powerful as what is found in chapters four and five of the book of Revelation. In these scriptures, God grants us a glimpse into His heavenly realm, His throne. It truly is beautiful beyond description and words fail the Apostle John as he tries to describe what he sees. Of even more importance to mankind than the beauties of heaven, is the message contained in these chapters. In these beautiful verses of scripture, we see the crucified Lamb of God taking the scroll which contains God's plan for saving man. He, and He alone, is worthy. He is the sinless sacrifice who was slain that we might live. There is no greater event in history. Man is saved.

God is the central figure in Chapter Four.

- **Verse One:** John sees an *"open door"* in heaven. An open door is a symbol of welcome and invitation. We (through John) are being invited into God's heavenly realm. The voice that John hears commands attention (*"like a trumpet"*) and is similar to the voice he heard in chapter 1 verse 10.
- **Verses Two and Three:** John describes the throne and the one who sits on the throne. The word "throne" is used seventeen times in chapters four and five. The frequent use of this word leaves no doubt as to the setting and that we are in the presence of royalty; one with great power. John struggles when trying to describe the one who sits on the throne (God Himself). He uses images of precious gems and the image of a rainbow. In his description of God, Ezekiel also used the image of a rainbow (see Ezekiel 1:28). Notice

throughout, the use of the word “like.” “Like a jasper... like an emerald.” There are no human words to properly describe God: His purity, brilliance, and beauty (like precious gems). His love and magnificence (like a rainbow). And behind (or above) it all is His righteousness and justice. Beautiful beyond description.

- **Verse Four:** The throne of God is the focal point in this heavenly scene but, around the throne, John also sees more thrones. There are twenty-four thrones with twenty-four “elders” sitting on them. Since they are sitting on thrones, this indicates that they too are ruling. These “elders” seem to represent the redeemed of God who are ruling with Him. Twelve from the old covenant and twelve from the new covenant. Literal or symbolic? Twelve representing the twelve tribes under the old covenant and twelve apostles representing the redeemed under the new covenant? See also Matthew 19:28.
- **Verse Five:** From the throne proceeded “*lightnings, thunderings, and voices.*” This brings to mind the scene at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16; Hebrews 12:18-21). There were also seven lamps burning before the throne. We are told that these seven lamps are the seven Spirits of God which were also mentioned in chapter 1 verse 4. See also Isaiah 11:2 which describes the Spirits of God that would be with King David.
- **Verses Six through Eight:** In verse six, four new creatures are described. They also are before the throne of God (in the midst and around). They are designated as “*living creatures.*” They never rest and there is nothing they do not see (“*eyes in front and in back*”). One is “*like a lion*” which represents strength. One is “*like a calf*” which represents service. One has “*a face like a man*” which represents intelligence. And one is like a “*flying eagle*” which represents speed and swiftness. They are at the same time both imposing and magnificent and they never leave the presence of God.
- **Verses Nine through Eleven:** The living creatures (vs. 8) praise God day and night. They praise Him for His holiness, which is absolute (Holy, Holy, Holy). They praise Him for His omnipotence (Lord God Almighty) and they praise Him because He is infinite and eternal (without beginning or end). Now, the twenty-four elders also join in the chorus of praise. They prostrate themselves before the throne of God and cast their crowns before His throne. The crowns they wear are victory crowns (see Revelation 2:10; 2 Timothy 4:8) not crowns of royalty. In 19:12 Christ is described as wearing “many crowns” (or diadems), one of which is the crown of royalty. When the 24 elders cast their crowns before the throne, they are acknowledging that God alone is worthy of praise and their victory came only through God’s grace and goodness.

The Lamb (Christ) is the central figure in Chapter Five

- **Verses One through Three:** John’s attention is drawn back to the One sitting on the throne. He sees an object in God’s hand. It is a scroll (or book) and there is much contained in it (“*written inside and on the back*”).

Unfortunately, no one can read the words because the scroll is tightly sealed (seven seals or completely/perfectly secured). The call goes out through all of heaven and earth to find one worthy to open the scroll so that its message can be revealed. But no one is found. What message is in the scroll? It must be important or God would not be holding it. It appears that He is the author.

- **Verses Four and Five:** The gravity of the situation and the importance of the message contained in the scroll is dramatically described in verse four *“So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.”* As we look back on this scene with perfect hindsight we understand the fate of mankind literally hung in the balance. God’s plan for redeeming man from his sin was contained in the scroll but only one without sin could open it. Only then would they be worthy. As John grieves over this hopeless situation, one of the twenty-four elders comes and comforts him. The elder tells him that there is One who is worthy: the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:9); the root of David (Isaiah 11:1; 53:2). Indeed, the book can be opened.
- **Verses Six and Seven:** John turns to look. Who/what is this marvelous creature that has conquered sin and every temptation of man? As he strains to see this “Lion of Judah” his eyes fall on a Lamb that is in the midst of the throne, the creatures, and the elders. The Lamb is standing but it appears to have been slain or sacrificed. The sacrificial Lamb of God (Isaiah 53:7-12). Slain but alive and not only alive but having absolute power (seven horns) and complete wisdom/insight (seven eyes). This Lamb approaches the throne of the almighty God of the universe and takes the scroll out of His hand. *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”* (Matthew 28:18). *“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2).
- **Verses Eight through Ten:** These verses are filled with praise for the Lamb. All heaven will join in this chorus of praise but it begins with those closest to God: the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. They praise Him with the harp and with golden bowls full of incense *“which are the prayers of the saints.”* Their prayers have been heard and answered. The song is primarily one of praise but it is also a song of redemption *“a new song”* (see Psalm 96 and 98). In verse 10, the word “us” is translated as “they” in some English translations of the New Testament. I think this better describes who have been made priests and kings and are ruling with Christ on earth. It is His disciples: Christians. *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...”* (1 Peter 2:9).
- **Verses Eleven through Fourteen:** In Verse 11, the angels join in the chorus of praise for the Lamb and their number is so great it cannot be counted by John. He simply says *“the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.”* What a stirring anthem this must have been. Angels as far as the eye can see singing a song of praise the likes of which none of us have ever heard. How stirred our souls become when we,

on earth, join our voices with fellow Christians to sing praises to the Lamb. How inspiring to the soul when we hear our voices joined together and feel our hearts united in perfect praise. But the mightiest chorus singing the most beautiful hymn here on earth pales when one considers this scene before the throne of God. The crescendo builds until all of God's creation has joined in the praise to God and to the Lamb. The scene concludes with the twenty-four elders prostrating themselves before the throne and the four living creatures giving their approval with a resounding "Amen!"

Questions for Discussion

1. Who is the central figure in chapter four?
2. How many times is the word "throne" used in chapters four and five? What is a throne and what is its significance in these chapters of Revelation?
3. Who are sitting on thrones around the throne of God?
4. How many "living creatures" were there around God's throne? How would you describe them?
5. Who is the object of worship in this chapter? Why is He worthy?
6. Who is the central figure in chapter five?
7. Who held the scroll in His right hand?
8. Who was found worthy to take the scroll and open it? Why is this significant?

9. Describe the appearance of the Lamb in verse six.
10. Who sang praises to the Lamb? Why was He worthy?

Making Application

These chapters remind us that God (in His three persons) is worthy of our constant praise and worship. He is our creator, our provider, protector and savior. There is no other (Acts 4:12). While we gain great strength and encouragement when we worship God with other Christians in songs and prayers, we need to be sure to devote time to private/personal worship. This may be in meditation on God's words, in prayers (which should include much praise), or even with a song of praise in our hearts or on our lips.

The Psalms are filled with praise for God. Choose one or two of the Psalms this week and let them fill your mind and heart. If you have difficulty choosing, I recommend Psalm 103. If you want to challenge yourself a little more, write a Psalm of praise to God. Pour out your heart to your Lord and Savior. Praise His mighty works. Make it personal. No one else needs to ever read it but just writing it will do you a world of good.

Revelation

Lesson Four

Six Seals Opened and an Interlude

“And they cried with a loud voice saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’”

Revelation 6:10

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the meaning of the symbolism following the opening of the first six seals and the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals.

Text:

Revelation 6 & 7

Introduction

Have you ever been somewhere when something very important was going to happen? Perhaps you were in the audience waiting for a mayor or governor, or even the president to announce a major decision that would affect the lives of thousands or even millions. Nothing any of us have experienced, or can even imagine, comes close to what John is describing in these chapters. Jesus, our Lord, is opening the seals that securely hold God’s plan for mankind’s salvation and ultimate victory over sin. Each time a seal is opened something of great significance happens. The events described affect not only God’s people but all of mankind. Isn’t it interesting that, even though men may ignore God and scoff at His Word, when His will is revealed everyone (including the scoffers) feels its affects.

The symbolism found in these chapters is rich and intense. There are horses of various colors carrying riders with vivid descriptions and amazing powers. The four living creatures (introduced in chapter four) are here imploring John to “*come and see.*” There are martyrs for Christ and angels ready to wreak havoc on the earth just waiting for God’s command. We see a large number (144,000) who are sealed and protected by God. And before His throne there is a “*great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues...*” Books could be (and have been) written on these 34 verses. We can study all of our lives and never fully grasp all that is being described here. Our study will not be that deep and will leave many questions still unanswered but we should be able to determine the central message and threads. Let’s briefly take a look at the opening of the first six seals and the interlude prior to the opening of the seventh seal. What was God telling His faithful in the first century and what is His message for us today?

Chapter Six

- **The first seal is opened (vs. 1 & 2):** At the opening of each of the first four seals, one of the four living creatures (4:6), loudly invites all to *“come and see.”* These creatures are the ones closest to God. Their significance (although unclear to us) cannot be emphasized too strongly. Like God’s angels, they are His messengers but at a higher level. They have been given much power and now they proclaim the things that will take place as the seals are opened. What happens as Christ takes His position on the throne and His gospel is preached on earth?
 - At the opening of the first seal, John sees one sitting on a **white horse** (purity and victory). His bow is ready for battle (Habakkuk 3:8-13) and He wears a crown (He has already won the victory). At the opening of the first seal, Christ’s gospel is going forth throughout the earth.
- **The second seal is opened (vs. 3 & 4):** When the second seal is opened a rider on a **fiery red horse** is loosed on the earth. Great persecution follows the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34 *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”*
- **The third seal is opened (vs. 5 & 6):** Severe discrimination against the poor and God’s people follows the opening of the third seal. There is a rider on a **black horse** and he has a pair of scales (balances) in his hand. The food for the common people (wheat, barley) was rationed while the luxury items only the rich could afford (oil and wine) were available in abundance. What happens when the gospel of Christ is preached? How many rich come to Christ? How many leaders of countries? How many of the powerful? Not many. *“And the common people heard Him gladly”* (Mark 12:37). Sadly, there is a price to pay. God is warning us that this will happen but be not dismayed, you will win in the end.
- **The fourth seal is opened (vs. 7 & 8):** Death was the name of the rider on the **pale horse** that appeared after the fourth seal was opened. We are also told that Hades followed after Death. In other words, there would be widespread death on earth following the preaching of Christ’s gospel and the spirits of those who died would immediately pass from this life to the next: the unseen realm of Hades. The natural consequences (famine, sword, and wild beasts) that followed the rejection of the gospel are very similar to the natural calamities God brought upon Jerusalem when they rejected Him and followed false Gods (Ezekiel 5:16-17). The death was widespread but limited (the number one fourth would indicate significant but limited destruction). This is in contrast to God’s final judgment which will be complete (2 Peter 3:10).
- **The fifth seal is opened (vs. 9 – 11):** There is no horse or rider described after the opening of the fifth seal. Instead John sees an altar and souls under the altar crying out for righteous judgment. This altar is mentioned again in

chapter 8 verse 3 after the seventh seal is opened. At that time (the opening of the seventh seal) God answers the prayers of His saints and intercession is made. Note that God does not deal in days and weeks and months but when events are accomplished in HIS time. The martyrs described in verses 10 & 11 are comforted, clothed in white robes, and told to rest a "little while longer." Righteous judgment will come but in the time determined by God.

- **The sixth seal is opened (vs. 12-17):** Partial judgment comes on those who are persecuting the church after the sixth seal is opened. In chapters 17 and 18 we are given a more detailed description of the fall of Rome but in these verses we are given an indication of what will happen. God hears the prayers of His saints. In these verses, John uses the same language that Isaiah used when describing the judgment against Babylon: it was the end of the world for Babylon (Isaiah 13:9-13, Isaiah 14:12, Isaiah 50:3, Isaiah 34:4-5). Partial judgments or judgments against nations (peoples) are frequently found in scriptures.
 - Isaiah 2:19-21 describes a judgment against Jerusalem.
 - Hosea 10:8 describes a judgment against Samaria.
 - Luke 23:30 describes a judgment against Jerusalem (by Rome).
 - Revelation 6:12-17 describes a judgment against Rome (or the Roman Empire).

Chapter Seven

- **The sealing of God's saints (vs. 1-3):** In verses 1-3 the destroying winds are being held back. They cannot break forth until God allows it; until God seals His saints. The winds are ready to blow on:
 - The earth (used consistently in Revelation to symbolize the realm of the unregenerate)
 - The sea (a symbol of society in general: the sea of mankind)
 - Trees (a symbol of strong faith, strong character): Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:7-8.

Troubles come to all but to those who have no faith in God, they are devastating. The servants of God (the trees) are sealed by God with a mark on their foreheads so when the winds are unleashed, they will not be destroyed (see also Ezekiel 9:4-6). A parallel could also be drawn with the Passover in Egypt when the angel of God passed over the houses that were marked or sealed with the blood. A mark on the forehead also indicates that which is closest to man's intellect. Following God is a choice, a conscious decision made with the mind.

- **The numbering of the sealed (vs. 4-8):** This is not the first time God's sealed are mentioned in the New Testament.
 - 2 Corinthians 1:20:22 – God has sealed His people.
 - Ephesians 1:13-14 – God's people are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.
 - Ephesians 4:30 – Sealed by the Holy Spirit of God for the day of redemption.

The seal of God represents not only ownership but also protection. These are God's children and He constantly protects them and provides for them.

Those who are sealed are described as "*of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*" 12,000 from each tribe or 144,000. Many want to make this number literal and finite but so far in the book of Revelation, we have seen little that is literal; nearly everything has been very symbolic. There is no reason to make an exception for this number. It is hard to explain it as a literal number but its symbolism is quite obvious. The number 12 is used in both the old and new covenants as a number with religious significance (the 12 sons of Jacob, the 12 apostles of Christ, etc.). What happens when the number 12 is multiplied by a large number, a full number: 1,000? We have a symbolic number representing God's people, the trees (vs. 3), the redeemed on earth at any point in time. No one knows their number but God (see Acts 2:47, 2 Peter 2:9). This symbolic number representing God's faithful on earth at any point in time is also mentioned in Revelation 14:1-5. Just as the number is symbolic so is the reference to the tribes of Israel. In this vision of John's, we have moved beyond the physical to the spiritual. All references in Revelation to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the twelve tribes of Israel, etc. are spiritual in nature. Since Christ (the Lamb of God) has sat down at the right hand of God, there is no going back to the old covenant. All eyes are on the future of the new heavens and the new earth. It is interesting to note that in this sealing of the twelve tribes of Israel, two of the tribes are missing: Ephraim and Dan. In the absence of these two tribes, two names are added to make the twelve: Joseph and Levi. When the land was divided, Joseph was not a tribe, rather his sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) received his inheritance (see Joshua 14:4). And, in the allotment of the land, none was given to the tribe of Levi since they, being priests, would not work the land but they would be supported by the other eleven tribes. Certain cities and common lands were given to the Levites for their residence but not a large allotment of land as with the other tribes. What symbolism and message is being sent by the exclusion of Ephraim and Dan from this list? Only God knows precisely but faithfulness has always been a requirement for God's redeemed.

- **The multitude from the great tribulation (vs. 9-17):** In verse 9 John describes a "*great multitude which no one could number.*" Once again, here is an instance of a number only God knows. This multitude appears before "*the throne and before the Lamb.*" They are clothed in robes of white (see 6:11) and they have palm branches in their hands. The palm branches indicate joy and festivity after the day of atonement. There are two feasts mentioned in Leviticus 23: the Feast of Atonement which was followed by the Feast of Tabernacles. "*And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days*" (Leviticus 23:40). Who is this multitude that is rejoicing before God's throne? One of the elders asked this question of John (vs. 13) and John replied that it was quite obvious that these "*are the ones who come out of the*

great tribulation.” They have endured the opening of the six seals and have remained faithful. It appears that this is a description of God’s faithful through all of the ages. This is consistent with the New Testament teaching that when saints die, they go into the presence of God (2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Philippians 1:21-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-19).

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the rider on the white horse represent (6:2)?
2. What does the rider on the fiery red horse represent (6:4)?
3. What does the rider on the black horse represent (6:5)?
4. What does the rider on the pale horse represent (6:8)?
5. What happened when the fifth seal was opened (6:9)?
6. When an animal sacrifice was offered (Leviticus 17:10-11) and the blood was poured out, what was in the blood? The souls under the altar (Revelation 6:9) had likewise poured out their blood or their _____ for the cause of Christ.
7. A “little time” (6:11) is how long? Does God deal in months, years, and days?
8. What happened when the sixth seal was opened (6:12)? Is this the final judgment or a partial judgment? Please explain.
9. Why are the winds being held back in Revelation 7:1?

10. What do the earth, sea, and trees represent (7:1 & 3)?
11. In 7:3, the 144,000 are sealed on their foreheads. How does this compare with those sealed in Ezekiel 9:4-6? Are there similarities?
12. What do 2 Corinthians 1:20-22, 2 Corinthians 5:5, Ephesians 1:13-14, and Ephesians 4:30 say about those who are sealed?
13. The number 12 is used in scriptures as a religious number. The number 1,000 represents a full number. What would these numbers represent when combined? $144,000 = (12 \times 12) \times 1000$
14. Are the tribes numbered in 7:5-8 literal or spiritual? See Romans 2:28-29, Romans 9:6-7, Galatians 3:29, Galatians 6:15-16.
15. Who is/are represented by the number 144,000? If someone were to ask you to explain the 144,000 and who they are, what would you tell them?

Making Application

What, in chapters 6 & 7, do you find most fascinating or compelling? Is it the images of the horses and riders that appeared at the opening of the first 4 seals? Is it the image of the martyred souls under the altar crying out for justice? Is it the sealing of God's people or something else that grabs your attention when you read these verses? Whatever it is, take a few moments and further reflect on the images and their meaning. If you keep a journal or if you are keeping a notebook as you study the book of Revelation, jot down your thoughts on these images and symbols. Meditate, pray, and consider more deeply the application for yourself, the church, and the world today.

Revelation

Lesson Five

The Seventh Seal and The Trumpets

The trumpets warn. Judgment is coming but there is still time to repent.

“And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

Revelation 9:21

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the nature of God’s warnings and judgments throughout history and the similarity of His warnings to nations today.

Text:

Revelation 8 & 9

Introduction

I am not a patient person. I become frustrated when things do not function properly e.g. my computer, printer, internet connection, etc. I am also impatient when it comes to receiving customer service. I recall an instance when I was home from college for a few days and my dad wanted me to go with him to the local government office to apply for a benefit I should be receiving while I was in college. As with most government agencies they were busy and we needed to sit in a waiting area until our name was called. After waiting for what seemed like hours (which was probably only a few minutes) I remembered there was a drug store close by where I worked when I was in high school so I asked my father if it would be okay if I went over there and said hello to my friends who still worked there. I could tell that he did not think that was a good idea and that our name might be called any minute but he relented and I rushed over to the drug store. After a very brief visit I hurried back to the government office only to find my father now standing in the waiting area and preparing to leave. Yes, while I was gone, our name was called and he went in and handled everything by himself. I could tell he was very disappointed in me and he had every right to be. Due to my impatience, I put him in the awkward position of doing my work for me. I received the benefit from the government but, more importantly, I learned a valuable lesson in not letting others down when they are counting on me. I am still impatient but I take my personal accountability to others very seriously.

Unlike me (and most people I know), God is patient, kind and longsuffering (2 Peter 3:9). His patience with a rebellious people is remarkable. He waited and pleaded with Israel and Judah to put away their idols and return to worshipping

Him alone as God. He brought famine and hardships on them to warn them and to cause them to repent. He postponed the day of the Lord time and again but, finally His judgment came and His chosen people were taken from the land that He had given them. Their sins and their refusal to repent had sealed their fate. In like fashion, God's warnings and judgments continue today. There is still time to repent. Will we?

There is one seal remaining on the book that the Lamb took out of the hand of God (5:7). This book contains God's plan for redeeming man or, as we know it today, the gospel of Christ. What will happen when it is finally revealed in its totality?

Chapter Eight

- **The seventh seal is opened (vs. 1-6):** When the seventh seal is opened *"there was silence in heaven about a half an hour."* Something very important is about to happen. Jehovah is about to act (see Zephaniah 1:7, Habakkuk 2:20, Zechariah 2:13). With all of the activity (singing and praising) happening in this throne scene, silence for even a minute or two would be deafening. But this was not a momentary silence. John describes it as an extended silence. He says it lasted for about half an hour. Try to imagine your local congregation (when assembled on the Lord's Day) being absolutely silent for 10 minutes or even 15 minutes. Now try to picture this scene with thousands and thousands of angels and the other heavenly creatures. There is absolute silence. Not a sound.
 - The angels who minister before God were given trumpets. They are waiting to sound the warning. But before they sound the trumpets, another angel appears. This angel was given much incense to offer with the prayers of the saints. This (burning incense as the people prayed) is what Zacharias (the father of John the Baptist) was doing when the angel of God appeared to him in the temple (Luke 1:8-11).
 - God hears and answers the prayers of His saints (Luke 18:1-8).
- **The first trumpet sounded (vs. 7):** In the Holy Scriptures, trumpets are used either to warn (Joel 2:1) or to call the congregation together (Numbers 10:1-10). It is apparent that the trumpets being sounded here are to warn. When the first angel sounded his trumpet, natural calamities followed: hail and fire destroyed a third of the trees and all of the green grass. This is a description of a partial judgment. It is neither complete nor final. It is a warning and a plea for repentance. God has always sent warnings before He poured out His wrath. This is another sign of the patience and longsuffering of God (2 Peter 2:9).
- **The second trumpet sounded (vs. 8-9):** Maritime commerce is affected when the second trumpet is sounded. As with the first trumpet (warning) this judgment is partial i.e. one-third of the ships were destroyed and one-third of the creatures in the sea died. Throughout history, nations have relied heavily on maritime commerce for trade and prosperity. Any

disruption in sea commerce would be devastating to local and global economies. This is especially true in the 21st century.

- **The third trumpet sounded (vs. 10-11):** The term “wormwood” is used as a metaphor in the prophets (see Amos 5:6-7; 6:12). It represented a perversion of justice. The “*great star that fell from heaven*” is the corruption of the kings and emperors. Many of the emperors considered themselves to be gods from heaven and demanded to be worshipped as such. With this trumpet, God is warning them that they are not gods. Jehovah alone is God and He is sending further calamities on the empire as their justice is perverted and their economy collapses. This warning is similar to the warning God gave to the king of Babylon who thought himself to be an immortal god (Isaiah 14:12-15). Power corrupts and emperors never seem to learn.
- **The fourth trumpet sounded (vs. 12-13):** At the sounding of the fourth trumpet, there was partial darkness: a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were darkened. As with nearly all of the images so far in Revelation, this is not to be taken literally but is a symbol of something. The partial darkness most likely represents the diminishing of true wisdom and insight. God is light (1 John 1:5) and true wisdom comes from above (James 3:17). As men became more enamored with their earthly wisdom and philosophies they drew further away from God and the source of light, goodness, and true wisdom. Romans 1:21 “...because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” When the economy collapses and the counsel of the wise is fruitless. When the days are dark with less and less light. Then a nation needs to consider its ways. There is still time to repent but judgment is coming.

Chapter Nine

- **The fifth trumpet sounded – the first woe (vs. 1-12):** Much happens after the fifth trumpet of warning is sounded. John sees another star fall from heaven (re. 8:10). This would be another created being who had elevated himself to be as God or above God. This being is given a name in verse 11: “Abaddon” in Hebrew or “Apollyon” in Greek. Both of these names mean “destroyer.” He more commonly in scripture is referred to as Satan (Luke 10:18) who is the destroyer of men’s souls. Note in verse 1 that Satan is “**given**” the key to the bottomless pit. He has no authority of his own (his limited power must be granted by God). “*All authority in heaven and on earth*” now resides with Christ, the Lamb of God (Matthew 28:18). When Satan opens the bottomless pit, a very dense smoke arises “*like the smoke of a great furnace.*” Out of the smoke came locusts (see Joel 1-2:11) that had the power to harm men but not to kill them (vs. 5). They also were not to harm those who had “*the seal of God on their foreheads*” (vs.4 and 7:3). As with Satan, the power of the locust was **given** to them (vs. 3) and their power was limited. We are reminded through all of this that God is still in control. Satan has

great power today but his power is limited. The charge given to the locusts was to torment men for five months. This torment was in some ways worse than death. *"In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them (vs. 6)."* Satan and his agents are running rampant through the empire. The nation is plagued with internal rottenness and corruption. *"One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things (vs. 12)."* There is still time to repent and this is what God desires (Joel 2:12-13).

- **The sixth trumpet sounded – the second woe (vs. 13-21):** In chapter 8 verse 3 an angel offered incense at the altar which is before God. Now, at the opening of the sixth seal, a voice is heard coming from this altar and it instructs the sixth angel (having sounded the trumpet) to *"release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."* This has reference to the four angels who were holding the four winds of the earth (7:1). In chapter seven they were instructed not to release the winds of destruction on the earth until God's faithful had been sealed. With God's people safely sealed and protected, now is the time to release these terrible winds. The winds contain a terrifying army that kills *"a third of mankind."* This army of destruction is numbered at 200 million horsemen. This hyperbole makes it very clear that God is unleashing great power on the earth to accomplish his ends. And we know that God uses the armies of men to mete out His judgments e.g. Assyria (Isaiah 10:5-7). Death comes in three ways: fire, smoke, and brimstone. This is significant destruction but not total. We know this is not a final judgment because there is still time to repent (vs. 20-21). God patiently waits but His waiting is in vain. Mankind has become hardened against God, truth, and purity. They would rather wallow in the filth of their immorality and proclaim themselves just. *"Professing to be wise, they became fools"* (Romans 1:22).

Questions for Discussion

1. What might be the meaning of the "silence" before the seventh seal is opened (8:1)? See Zephaniah 1:7, Habakkuk 2:20, Zechariah 2:13.
2. Who makes intercession for the saints (8:2-3)? See Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:34.
3. Name two purposes for the sounding of the trumpets found in Numbers 10:1-10.

4. For what purpose are the trumpets sounded in Revelation 8 & 9?

5. The term “wormwood” (8:11) is used as a metaphor in the prophets. What is its meaning in Amos 5:7 and 6:12?

6. In the book of Joel, locusts are a forerunner of a greater judgment to come. In Joel 2:12-13, what does God want His people to do?

7. To what did Christ have the keys (Revelation 1:18)? To what did this “*star fallen from heaven*” have keys (9:1)?

8. What is the name of the king over the locusts (9:11)? What does it mean?

9. What were the three plagues that killed mankind (9:18)?

10. Did those who were not killed repent?

Making Application

Do you think God is sending warnings and partial judgments against the nations today? If so, in what ways? And, if this is the case, what are we the children of God to do?

Revelation

Lesson Six

A Little Book, Two Witnesses, and the Seventh Trumpet

“Then I said, ‘Lord, how long?’ And He answered: ‘Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, the houses are without a man, the land is utterly destroyed.’”

Isaiah 6:11

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the meaning of this interlude in the Revelation and the significance of the images: book, witnesses, the seventh and last trumpet.

Text:

Revelation 10 & 11

Introduction

Have you ever been to an action packed movie that kept you on the edge of your seat constantly? There is so much happening: good guys, bad guys, battles, evil forces, etc. In most good action movies, the director strategically places interludes to break up the action. Interludes are scenes where the action is muted. This gives the hero time to reflect and perhaps encourage his troops before the next big battle. You know the next battle is coming and that this is only a break in the action but interludes help to build the tension and fill in critical parts of the story. Similarly, but on a much grander scale, God provides interludes in this dramatic and glorious apocalyptic book. There have been warnings and partial judgments; horses with heads like lions that breathed fire and brimstone. There were locusts with tails like scorpions that were allowed to torment men for a limited period of time. Still to come are a terrible dragon and beasts from the sea and the earth. An epic battle is coming pitting the forces of good against the forces of evil. The fate of mankind hangs in the balance. But first, God provides an interlude. A scene depicting, of all things, John eating a little book. What is this all about?

Just as chapter seven provided an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, so now there is another interlude before the seventh trumpet is sounded. As mentioned above, interludes not only provide the reader time to catch their breath before the next scene of intense action but also are an opportunity to introduce new things that, while not part of the primary message, add great insight to the events taking place and help one to better understand the overall theme and message. In chapter seven, God’s faithful were sealed or protected before the four winds of destruction were unleashed on the earth. In chapters ten and eleven, before the seventh trumpet is sounded, John (the one writing the Revelation)

receives special instruction and two witnesses of great significance are introduced. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the third and final woe is also pronounced on mankind. The pouring out of God's wrath is imminent.

Chapter Ten

- **The mighty angel with the little book (vs. 1-7):** For the second time in Revelation a "mighty" or strong angel appears. A mighty angel first appeared in chapter 5 verse 1 and a third strong angel will appear in chapter 18 verse 21. Angels are God's ministering spirits. "Mighty" angels have been given special strength to deliver a great message. The angel had a book in his hand. In contrast to the book in chapter 5 (verses 1-7), this book is described as a "little book" and it is open unlike the book (scroll) that Christ took from God the Father which was sealed with 7 seals. Even though the message the angel is to deliver is very severe, the rainbow around his head may be seen as a sign of mercy. There will be no more delay. The mystery of God, which He had declared to His prophets, will finally be revealed. *"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into"* (1 Peter 1:10-12).
- **John eats the little book (vs. 8-11):** John was told (in verse 4) not to write certain things which he had heard. Now (in verse 8) that same voice tells him to take the little book from the mighty angel. He then is instructed by the angel to eat the book and prophesy. The prophet Ezekiel was likewise told by God to eat a book (Ezekiel 3:1-3; 3:14). In both instances (John and Ezekiel), the book was sweet to the taste but later became bitter in the stomach. The word of God is sweet to the individual when he hears it and is learning it but when you must preach it to a stubborn and rebellious people, it may be difficult and bitter. The application can be hard and result in bitterness. The work of a prophet is not easy.

Chapter Eleven

- **The temple of God (vs. 1-2):** Like Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-42), John is instructed to measure the temple of God. When God requires measures He is exacting or requiring a standard. Anything that would enter the temple of God must be measured. It must be holy. It must meet God's standards. But that which is outside His temple, the court, is not measured (verse 2). It is subject to physical attack and corruption. This is a contrast between the spiritual church and the physical church. The Gentiles (the Romans) were allowed to *"tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months"* (a broken period of time). Christians were martyred by the Romans and continue to

receive persecution from religious sects and governments today but, the world cannot destroy the spiritual stones – the true temple of God. So what John was told to measure was not a physical temple but a spiritual one. There had been three physical temples in Jerusalem: the one built by Solomon, the one built under the direction of Zerubbabel, and the one built under the direction of Herod the Great (the temple which existed during the time of Christ). But, after Christ's crucifixion and the veil being torn in two, the physical temple lost its significance. God proclaimed through Paul that Christians are now the temple of God because His Spirit dwells in them (I Corinthians 3:16) and not in a physical temple. See also Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:5, and Zechariah 2:1-5. We, as God's people are His temple. Therefore, we must be holy and adhere to His standards (measures) and not our own.

- **The broken period of time (vs. 2):** In chapter 11 verse 2 it states that the Gentiles “*will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.*” Is this literal or symbolic? As with most numbers and images in Revelation, its meaning is best understood when interpreted as a symbolic number. Since the Jewish month was 30 days, then 42 months would represent 1260 days. This number (1260 days) is found in the next verse (verse 3) when referring to the two witnesses and the length of their prophecy. It is also used in chapter 12 verse 6 to describe the length of time the radiant woman would be protected by God in the wilderness. Later in chapter 12 (verse 14), the time in the wilderness is defined as “*time and times and a half time*” (3 ½ years). Finally, 42 months is also found in chapter 13 verse 5 to define how long the beast from the sea would be given authority. These five instances are all describing the same length of time and it is being described as an incomplete or broken period of time. God consistently uses 7 as the perfect or complete number. 3 ½ (half of 7) is incomplete. It is a period of time, known to God but there is nothing complete, or perfect about it. It will come and it will go. Satan has power and influence but it is limited and it is only for a determined span of time.
 - The holy city tread underfoot (42 months)
 - The preaching of the 2 witnesses (1260 days)
 - The church in the wilderness (1260 days; time, times and half a time)
 - The power/authority of the sea beast (42 months)
- **The two witnesses prophesy (vs. 3-6):** Who are these two witnesses? A reasonable interpretation is that they represent the faithful witnesses of God who went out during the Apostolic Period boldly preaching the gospel of Christ. God protected them as they proclaimed the good news to all nations. They could not be stopped. The idea of “two witnesses” is found numerous times in the scriptures:

- Deuteronomy 17:6 *“Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.”*
- Deuteronomy 19:15 *“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”*
- Matthew 18:16 *“But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’”*
- Mark 6:7 *“And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two...”*
- Acts 13:2 *“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”*
- Acts 15:39-40 *“...And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.”*
- **The two witnesses killed (vs. 7-10)**: As the gospel spread to all nations and peoples, persecution followed. Whether it’s due to other religions, the fear of losing money (Demetrius the silversmith, Acts 19:24), or power (the Pharisees) or simply not wanting to change our lives, many people greatly resist the gospel up to and including killing God’s messengers. This was true in the time of the prophets. It was true in the time of the Apostles. It is true today. *“And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another...”* Also, “the beast” is first mentioned here in verse 7. This is the beast that came from the bottomless pit (9:1) which was also the origin of the locusts that were given great power to torment men. The beast makes war against the witnesses, overcomes them, and ultimately kills them. We will learn more about this beast in chapter 13.
- **The two witnesses resurrected (vs. 11-14)**: The bodies of the witnesses lie in the street of the great city for 3 ½ days (another broken but brief period of time). Great contempt is shown the witnesses and their cause by not removing their bodies and properly burying them. Such was/is the hate the world has for those who would expose their sin and abominable acts. However, God remembers His own. Even though slain, God’s witnesses will be victorious.

As the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:8,9, & 14 “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you.”

God breathes into their dead bodies the breath of life and they ascend into heaven. *“... and their enemies saw them.”* God’s work and great power is not

hidden. The world may turn their heads and close their eyes, but God's works are not done in secret. The ultimate victory of His saints will not be a private ceremony but an event witnessed by every creature in the universe.

- **The third woe and the sounding of the Seventh Trumpet (vs. 15):** The sixth angel sounded their trumpet in chapter 9 verse 13. Now, after an interlude encompassing all of chapter 10 and most of chapter 11, the seventh (and final) trumpet is sounded by the seventh angel. This is the warning of the third and final woe. Notice the contrast between the opening of the seventh seal (8:1) when there was silence in heaven and the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15) when there are loud voices in heaven proclaiming *"the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"* In chapter 8 there was anticipation that something very great was about to happen. At the close of chapter 11, that great event is declared. Daniel prophesied of four world empires or kingdoms (Daniel chapters 2 and 7): the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek (Alexandrian) Empire, and finally the Roman Empire. Daniel foretold that before these empires came to an end (*"in the days of these kings"*), God would establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed. *"And the kingdom shall not be left to other people"* (all of the four world empires were eventually conquered and possessed by others). *"It shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."* Today God's kingdom stands alone. Christ has conquered and is reigning today. Where are the kingdoms of men? Again the loud voices proclaim *"the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"* Christ rules today. None of the prophets specifically prophesied about anything beyond the destruction of the 4th empire (the Roman Empire).
- **The defeat of heathen powers by God's Anointed (vs. 16-19):** The 24 elders (4:4) prostrate themselves before the throne of God and praise Him for his great power and sovereignty. The heathen nations raged against the Lord God Almighty but He held them in derision (Psalm 2:1 & 4). In the end, God is victorious and all those who serve him shall be rewarded. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His anointed shall reign forever and ever. In verse 19 the temple of God is open and we (through John) are given a glimpse at the Ark of the Covenant. What is the significance? There are 2 likely possibilities:
 - The Ark with its mercy seat, depicts God's mercy extended to man.
 - The Ark is a reminder that God keeps His covenant with His people.
- The sounding of the seventh trumpet and the pronouncement of the third woe end with *"lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail"*. This is similar to: 4:5, 8:5, and 16:18. God is acting re. Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16-18).

Questions for Discussion

1. How many times in Revelation is there a “strong (or mighty) angel” mentioned? In what chapters and verses are they found?
2. Is Jesus ever represented as an angel in the book of Revelation?
3. How does the “little book” mentioned in 10:2 differ from the book described in chapter 5:1-7?
4. What passage in Ezekiel also contains a book that was to be eaten? What does the sweetness represent? What does the bitterness represent?
5. In contrast to the spiritual temple of God (verse 11:1), what is the “*court which is outside the temple*” (11:2)? Can it be harmed by the world?
6. The two witnesses had power to cause it not to rain. Elijah also had this power (1 Kings 17). How long did the drought last during Elijah’s days (Luke 4:25; James 5:17)? For how long did the two witnesses prophesy (11:3)?
7. What three cities or countries are mentioned in 11:8? What do they symbolize?
8. The passage of the two witnesses in chapter 11 can be broken into 3 parts:
 - a. Verses 3-6
 - b. Verses 7-10
 - c. Verses 11-13What do each of these parts represent?

9. Does the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15) indicate the final judgment?
10. In the scriptures, trumpets were often used to sound a _____.
11. Daniel chapter 7 describes 4 beasts that come out of the sea (we will also see a beast from the sea in Revelation 13). These beasts represent 4 great world empires. The first was Babylon and the last was Rome. What were the other two?
12. In Daniel 7:21 it says the saints were overcome by one of the beasts until what happened (vs 22)?
13. Did the prophets in the Old Testament prophesy specifically about anything beyond the destruction of the 4th empire (the Roman Empire)?
14. Daniel prophesied that God would establish His kingdom during the time of the 4th empire and His kingdom would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44 and 7:27). What is God's kingdom? Is it still around today?
15. John and Daniel both prophesied that the heathen powers would fall and the saints would be _____.
16. What inheritance did God give to Christ (Psalm 2:8)?
17. What similarities are found in Revelation 4:5, 8:5, 11:19, and 16:18?

Making Application

If the book of Revelation had meaning to the Christians in the first century and is filled with things that “*must shortly take place,*” what is the application to the Christian living in the 21st century? Consider that God’s Kingdom and power have not diminished with time and that He still rules over the kingdoms of men.

Revelation

Lesson Seven

The Woman, The Dragon, and The Beasts

“Before she was in labor, she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to give birth in one day? Or shall a nation be born at once?...”

Isaiah 66:7-8

Lesson Goal:

To properly interpret the symbolism in chapters 12 and 13 (woman, dragon, and beasts) and to understand the application for us today.

Text:

Revelation 12 & 13

Introduction

After the seventh and final trumpet is sounded a great and terrible conflict takes place. The forces of evil and the forces of good are battling for the souls of men. Even now in the latter parts of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, great stories and colossal motion pictures are centered around this theme: good vs. evil. J.R.R. Tolkien’s masterful story of hobbits, orcs, dragons, and wizards is really a story of good vs. evil. Which will be victorious? The fate of mankind (or at least Middle Earth) hangs in the balance. And when George Lucas envisioned a battle in a galaxy far, far away it became a battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil (the dark side). These stories of great conflict enthrall us and keep us eagerly turning the next page or sitting on the edge of our seat to find out what happens. They enthrall us because we can relate to this conflict. We understand good and evil. We understand them both on a personal level and on a universal level. Each of us faces good and evil every day.

And so it has always been with man. From the moment Satan made his appearance in the garden, mankind has been confronted with evil. Just as Adam and Eve in the Garden, we too must choose. We cannot escape that responsibility. God grants us free will. Christ said in Matthew 12:30 *“He who is not with Me is against Me...”* and strictly warned the Laodiceans that not choosing is not acceptable (Revelation 3:15-16). Joshua said *“...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...”* (Joshua 24:15). We make choices every day in the words we use, in the company we keep, in the God we serve. In these chapters in Revelation a great battle is described. While most of this battle is heavenly (Michael and his angels), we too are involved in the conflict. Ephesians 6:12 *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* WE

wrestle! We are not bystanders and spectators to this conflict. We are in the midst of it. It is a battle for OUR souls. The powers of darkness are ruthless... much more powerful than flesh and blood. But God is our guardian and Christ is our king. With them we will be victorious.

Chapter Twelve

- In his commentary on Revelation, Homer Hailey¹ divides the apocalyptic book into two major divisions: chapters 1-11 and chapters 12-22. The second part of the book he titles "War and Victory!" and, in his opinion, chapters 12 and 13 are the keys to understanding Revelation. In these chapters and chapter 14, seven figures are introduced:
 - The Woman
 - The Dragon
 - The Man Child
 - The Sea Beast
 - The Earth Beast
 - God's Faithful People
 - One like the Son of Man

A proper understanding of these figures: who/what they represent, and what they do is critical.

- **The Radiant Woman (vs. 1-2):** Who is this woman in travail? While there are many interpretations of who/what she represents, it seems most likely that she is the same woman (also in travail) spoken of in Micah 4:9-10 and Isaiah 66:7-8. This woman was laboring to give birth to a male child and a nation. She symbolized God's faithful remnant under the old covenant through whom the Messiah would be born. But the radiant woman in Revelation represents more than just the faithful Jews. Later in chapter 12 (vs. 17), her children "*keep the commands of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.*" Consistent with Hebrews 9:15; 11:40, she represents the faithful remnant of God's people in totality (under both the old and new covenants).
- **The Dragon (vs. 3-4):** The dragon is described in detail and is clearly identified as "*the Devil and Satan*" (vs. 9). Satan is described as murderous (fiery red), cunning (seven heads), ruthless and very powerful (a dragon with ten horns). He is also described as one with authority "*seven diadems on his head.*" The word "diadem" occurs three times in Revelation and nowhere else in the New Testament. The word, which signifies royal power or rule, is found here referring to Satan and his power to rule over the forces of evil on earth. It is also found in 13:1 when describing the Sea Beast's political power and in 19:12 Christ is said to wear "*many diadems*" indicating His rule over many realms as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It should be noted that Satan never wears a victory crown ("*stephanos*" 2:10) because He, unlike God's faithful, never wins any permanent victories.

The dragon, Satan, eagerly awaits the birth of the child in order to destroy Him and foil God's plan for redeeming man. This has been Satan's mission beginning in the Garden of Eden, culminating here with Christ, and continuing with Christ's seed until the end of the age.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"
(Genesis 3:15).

Satan was waiting for the birth of the Christ in order to cause Him, like every other being clothed in flesh, to sin. This would be Satan's ultimate victory but, as we know, the Lamb of God foiled Satan by never being stained with the curse of sin. Satan bruised His heel through the humiliation of the cross but Christ crushed Satan's head. Now all that Satan can do is take as many of God's creation with him to his eternal punishment. His fate has been sealed but he still *"walks about as a roaring lion, seeking those he may devour"* (1 Peter 5:8).

- **The Male Child (vs. 5-6):** The child was born as had been promised by God through His prophets. This was the Messiah, the Savior of mankind who would redeem them from their sins. He would establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed and, in so doing, He would *"rule all nations with a rod of iron"* Psalm 2:7-9. After His crucifixion, Christ ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9-11) where He reigns today over His church, the faithful remnant, the woman in this passage. In order to be protected from Satan (the dragon) the woman fled into the wilderness where "they" (God and Christ) cared for her. The church would undergo severe persecution for 1260 days (a broken period of time – see the explanation in lesson 6). This was a difficult time for God's faithful but, even in the darkest time, God provides. The woman will reappear in verses 13-17.
- **War with Satan (vs. 7-12):** Consistent with the rest of this apocalyptic writing, the war described here was not a physical war in heaven but symbolic of a great ongoing conflict between the forces of good (Michael) and the forces of evil *"that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan."* Of note, there are only two angels specifically named in the Bible: Michael and Gabriel. In addition to this passage in Revelation, Michael is mentioned three times in Daniel: 10:13, 10:21, and 12:1 and also in Jude 9. In each of these instances, he is battling the forces of evil and defending God's people. The angel Gabriel is mentioned twice in Daniel (8:16, 9:21) and twice in the gospel of Luke (1:16, 1:26). In each of these passages, Gabriel is described (fittingly for an angel) as a messenger of God. God is surrounded by legions of angels but it is apparent that Michael and Gabriel have special positions and responsibilities. God has honored them highly by assigning them special roles. We are not given a detailed description of the war between Satan and Michael and his angels. We are simply told of its result: Satan was defeated and he and his

angels were cast to the earth. There were two significant consequences as a result of Michael's victory over Satan.

- *"Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come... therefore rejoice O heavens, and you who dwell in them."*
- *"Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."*

As the woman is protected and nourished, the kingdom of God is established with power. At the same time, Satan is defeated and his fate is sealed. He can now only wreak havoc on the earth for a short while. This he did in the first and second centuries and continues to do today with great terror and the destruction of men's souls. There are three ways for God's people to overcome Satan (vs. 11):

- By the blood of the Lamb
- By the word of their testimony
- By not fearing death

The battle still rages today for the souls of men.

- **The Woman Persecuted (vs. 13-17):** Even though Satan's power is now greatly limited, he still can persecute and inflict tremendous harm on the woman and her offspring. In verse 14 (just as in verse 6) the woman is cared for (*"nourished"*) by God and Christ during this time of extreme persecution (*"time and times and a half time"*). Satan is thwarted by God in his pursuit of the woman so he unleashes his poisonous venom as a flood on the earth thinking that there was no way the woman could escape this flood of deceit and lies. However, in this instance, the woman was helped by the earth (the unregenerate masses). The people of the world (the earth), love Satan's lies. They can't get enough of his false promises, false gods, and immorality. *"The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth."* He could not destroy the woman so, in his rage he made war with her offspring. These were those faithful to Christ mentioned in vs. 11. While undergoing great persecution they still overcame Satan *"by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."*

Chapter Thirteen

- **The Beast from the Sea (vs. 1-10):** In chapter 13 the war between the forces of good and the forces of evil continues but two new combatants are introduced: a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. In verses 1-10, the focus is on the beast from the sea. Who is this beast and/or what does it represent? It is apparent that this beast is fighting on the side of evil: he receives his power, throne, and authority from Satan (the dragon vs. 2) and he makes war with the saints (vs. 7). The beast is also described as arising out of the "sea." In the scriptures, the word "sea" frequently represents humanity or society. Daniel (Daniel 7:2-3) saw four beasts arising from the

sea. The fourth beast in Daniel's vision was similar to the beast John describes here in that it had ten horns (indicating great power). In addition, the sea beast in Revelation was like a leopard (the third beast in Daniel 7), had feet like a bear (the second beast in Daniel 7), and the mouth of a lion (the first beast in Daniel 7). As we consider interpreting these images today, we must also consider what these images meant to a Christian reading John's message in the first or second century. They would have been very familiar with the apocalyptic book of Daniel. They would have recognized this beast as the one described by Daniel and they would have looked for and seen the connection. The images would have meant nothing to a Roman if the letter slipped into their hands but the images would have meant everything to a Christian. The great and terrible beast described in Daniel is here (the fourth and greatest of the empires, the Roman Empire) but his reign of terror will be limited (42 months Revelation 13:5; time, and times and half a time Daniel 7:25). When Christ triumphs over the beast (Revelation 19:19-20), all the empires foretold by Daniel (the empires of man) have ended and been subdued.

*"I was watching in the night visions,
 And behold, One like the Son of Man,
 Coming with the clouds of heaven!
 He came to the Ancient of Days,
 And they brought Him near before Him.
 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
 That all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
 His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 Which shall not pass away,
 And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed."*
 Daniel 7:13-14

When Christ ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11) He fulfilled this prophecy and, when He came before the Ancient of Days and took the scroll out of His right hand (Revelation 5:6-7) His kingdom was established. All that remained was for Him to slay the dragon and the dragon's evil forces on earth (the beasts) who had been given a limited time to battle for the souls of men. When Christ returns one day in the clouds, it will not be to establish His kingdom and to rule on earth. It will be to judge the world (see Luke 19:11-27).

- **The Beast From the Earth (vs. 11-17):** In contrast to the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth has much less power (only 2 horns as opposed to 10 for the sea beast). The description of this beast seems to portray a mouthpiece or spokesman for the greater beast. If the beast from the sea is the Roman Empire, the beast from the earth represents the Roman Emperors (such as Domitian) who put themselves in the position of God and demanded to be worshipped as deity.
 - *"Spoke like a dragon."* That is, he was in a public position of authority to speak and when he spoke he spoke lies (like Satan).

- Exercised the authority of the first beast. In other words, he was a faithful soldier for the first beast. He took what the Sea Beast said and proclaimed it throughout the empire and then he required all to worship the first beast.
- Performed great signs and deceived mankind by those signs.
- Gave breath to the image of the beast. The emperors were the breath or life behind the empire.
- Killed those who would not worship the image of the Sea Beast and/or marked them for public shame and discrimination.
- **The Number of the Beast: 666 (vs. 18):** Much has been made of this number. Books have been written and many theories expounded on it. This is a verse (and number) that many like to extract from Revelation and give special meaning. When this is done, the interpretations typically are far-fetched and sometimes quite humorous (if only those who proposed the interpretation did not take it seriously). I have found Homer Hailey's explanation the most easy to understand and the most consistent with what I believe to be the primary themes of Revelation. Following is a quote from Hailey's commentary.

“Since the Apocalypse abounds in the symbolic use of numbers which express ideas rather than persons or literal quantities, the same principle should be followed in the interpretation of this number. Throughout the book, seven expresses the idea of perfection or completeness: the seven churches, seven horns, seven eyes, seven spirits, and so forth. So six, which falls below the sacred seven, can never be seven or reach perfection; therefore, it symbolizes the imperfect, that which is human and destined to fail. It is said that to the Jews the number six was an omen or symbol of dread and doom, so when it was tripled, 666, it represented the completeness of doom and failure.

“In these comments it has been concluded that the first beast represented the Roman Empire in its power and opposition to the kingdom of God. It epitomized the sum of all the world's political opposition to God and righteousness for all time. It was further concluded that the second beast symbolized the pagan priesthood or commune of the emperor cult, backed by the political power of the empire; this also in turn represented all false religion since the fall of the Roman pagan system. It is now concluded that the number of the beast, six-six-six, stands for the complete and total failure of all human systems and efforts antagonistic to God and His Christ – all are doomed to ultimate and complete defeat and failure. This explanation is in harmony with the theme and purpose of Revelation.”²

Questions for Discussion

18. What are the 7 figures introduced in chapters 12, 13, & 14?

19. The dragon (12:3) is identified in verse 9. Who is the dragon?
20. In 12:3, it states that the dragon wears 7 diadems. Is a diadem a crown of royalty or a victory crown? Contrast this crown with the one described in Revelation 2:10
21. When trying to identify who/what the woman represents, why is it important to note that the church did not give birth to Christ?
22. How do Micah 4:9-10 and Isaiah 66:7-8 help to identify who the woman represents?
23. Who does the woman represent?
24. How do Psalm 2:6-8, Isaiah 11:4 and Revelation 19:15 help us to identify the male child (12:5)?
25. What is the sting of death? (1 Corinthians 15:55-56)
26. Why did death have no power over Christ? (Hebrews 2:14-15; Acts 2:22-24)
27. How did Christ destroy the works of the devil? (1 John 3:8)

28. In Revelation 12:10, who rules now?
29. In which 3 ways did the faithful overcome Satan? (Revelation 12:11)
30. What spewed out of the mouth of Satan in 12:15?
31. What 2 beasts are introduced in chapter 13?
32. From where did the beast from the sea get its power (13:2)?
33. If one follows Christ, who is he worshipping? If one follows this beast from the sea, who is he worshipping?
34. Which chapter in Daniel helps to give us an understanding of this beast?
35. What/who does the beast from the sea represent?
36. In Luke 19:11-27, Christ describes Himself as a nobleman who is going into a far country to receive a kingdom. When this nobleman returns does he reign over his subjects or judge them? Is Christ reigning today? See also: Revelation 1:5-6; 5:13, and Daniel 7:13-14. When He returns, what will He do?

37. What is the doctrine of pre-millennialism and how is it refuted by Daniel 2, Daniel 7, Luke 19:11-27, and Revelation 1:5-6?
38. What/who was the 4th beast in Daniel 7?
39. What was the fate of the beast from the sea (Revelation 19:19-20)?
40. What/who was the beast from the earth (Revelation 13:11)?
41. With whose voice does the beast from the earth speak (Revelation 13:11)?
42. Does the number 666 (found in verse 18 of chapter 13) represent a specific person? If not, what does it mean?

Making Application

The doctrine that when Christ returns He will reign on earth for one thousand years (the millennial), is very popular today. It is a fairly recent doctrine having gained wide acceptance among churches within the last 150 years. Do a little research and learn what you can about millennialism and pre-millennialism. How would you, using God's word, refute this teaching?

Revelation

Lesson Eight

The 144,000 and the Bowls of Wrath

"...as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

Abraham Lincoln
2nd Inaugural Address
Quoting from Psalm 19

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the judgments of God in the first and second centuries and His judgments against mankind today.

Text:

Revelation 14, 15, & 16

Introduction and Commentary

Immediately following the appearance of the dragon and the two beasts (one from the sea and one from the earth), there is a great scene of judgment. While the dragon is fierce and his two accomplices are powerful, God wants all to know that they will be defeated. They may have temporary victories, up to and including the torture and killing of God's saints, but their victories will be short-lived and ultimately they will be defeated. Take heart, the battle belongs to the Lord.

How often have each of us as Christians seen this play out either in our own lives or in the lives of those around us? If/when we persevere and do what is right, good will win out. When all hope is gone, don't quit doing what is right, don't compromise. God is with us if we keep our faith. He will never leave us and, in the end, we will be victorious. But, if we give in and follow our own lusts, good will also leave us and we will sink further and further into sin and corruption. Without God there is no hope, only darkness and despair, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

I was watching a BBC episode of "Sherlock" (based on the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) the other night and one of the characters was being tempted to have an affair and be unfaithful to his wife. When he finally came to himself and admitted the obvious that being unfaithful to his wife would be wrong, he also came to the realization that "this would not end well." How true. While I can think of no better response than that of Joseph to Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:9 *"How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God,"* a reflection on where one's actions will lead or end should also put a damper on things. This affair might be "exciting" or "pleasurable" for a while but where would it end? Nothing good would come from it. Nothing good ever comes from sin. In the end you die and in the process you may destroy the lives of others also. I am reminded of a warning that Moses

gave to the children of Reuben and the children of Gad (Numbers 32) when they requested the land east of the Jordan for their inheritance. If you fail to keep your promise... *"your sin will find you out"* (32:32). They promised to enter the land of Canaan and fight alongside their brethren until their enemies had been subdued. Then, and only then, would they return to their lands on the east of the Jordan. Moses (under God's direction) agreed to their request but gave them this stern warning as a condition. He was saying in so many words, "this will not end well for you" if you fail to keep your promise. The same warning could have been given to the Christians living in the first and second centuries and to us today: *"your sins will find you out."*

The Christians in the first and second centuries had to choose whom they would serve. If they served the beasts and the dragon their lives would be easier but, in the end, they would lose all. If they chose to serve the Lamb, their lives would most likely be hard but, in the end, they would be victors and wear the victory crown (2:10). We today are faced with a similar choice. The dragon (Satan) is still loose and on the prowl.

Previous to this judgment, God had sent trumpets (the seven trumpets in chapters 8 through 11) to warn but now there are no more warnings. God's final judgment is poured out on mankind through the bowls containing His wrath. His judgments are *"true and righteous"* (16:7) but also swift, severe, and final. The end is near. Let's look at God's judgments in the bowls of wrath.

Chapter Fourteen

- **The Lamb, the 144,000, and Judgments (vs. 1-13):** The Lamb, who was introduced in chapter 5 (verse 6) and who was found worthy to open the scroll, now stands on Mount Zion. Compare Revelation 14:1 with Psalm 2:6. In the Psalm, God says that He has set (or installed) His king on His holy hill of Zion. In Revelation 14, God's anointed (the Lamb) is standing on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is a symbol of the dwelling of God, a mighty fortress. Once again, images and symbols found in the Psalms and the prophets appear again in Revelation. Standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion are the 144,000 who were first mentioned in chapter 7 verses 3-4. As we determined in chapter 7, this 144,000 is not a literal number but is a symbolic number representing God's faithful on earth at any point in time (see the notes from lesson 4). These are God's people who are fighting the battle with Christ. Notice John's description of them:
 - *Purchased out of the earth (vs. 5).* They were once sinners but were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (see 5:9).
 - *Not defiled (vs. 4).* They were spiritually pure as virgins. They were not defiled by false religions.
 - *They follow the Lamb (vs. 4).* In contrast to the sheep following the shepherd, the redeemed follow the Lamb of God. Their faith, their trust, and their hope is completely in Him. They do not follow Satan and His beasts.

- *Redeemed from men; first-fruits to God and to the Lamb (vs. 4).* Under the Law of Moses, God required the first-fruits (the first born, the first of the flock, the first of the harvest, etc. Exodus 13:11-16). The first-born son was to be redeemed or bought back from God for a price (Exodus 34:20). Under Christ, God has redeemed, bought back, or paid the ransom for mankind because we all have sinned (Romans 3:23). The price God paid was His ONLY begotten son. *“For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are His first-fruits.
- *No lie (vs. 5).* Satan is the Father of lies and deceit (John 8:44). God’s faithful are true and have not been poisoned with Satan’s lies (Revelation 12:15-16). Truth and light are diametrically opposed to lies and darkness and those who lie will have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).

Beginning in verse 6 and continuing through verse 11, three angels proclaim the judgments of God.

- The first angel (vs. 6-7) had the gospel (good news) to preach to all of every nation who dwell on earth. In Mark 16:15 Christ said to His apostles *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”* John was writing that the gospel of the Messiah would be preached throughout the world before judgment came.
- The second angel (vs. 8) proclaims that Babylon has fallen. This is the first time in the apocalypse that Babylon is mentioned. McMurray, Hailey, Swete, and others suggest that Babylon symbolizes not just Rome, the world power, but the world of lust and seduction. *“...the phrase looks to the passionate lusts of the world, represented by Rome, by which Rome intoxicated the nations, bringing upon that world God’s wrath, for sin always brings wrath...He declares the fall of Babylon, the world-city of lust which does not heed the warning; it is doomed, for God’s wrath is about to be poured out upon it.”*² Note also Jeremiah’s warning against the city of Babylon (Jeremiah 51:8) fifty years before its fall to the Medes.
- The third angel (vs. 9-11) proclaims judgment on those who worship the beast. This beast appears to be the beast from the earth mentioned in chapter 13 verses 11-17. In chapter 13 it was indicated that those who worshipped the earth beast would *“receive a mark on their right hand or foreheads”* (vs. 16). This same reference to a mark is made here in chapter 14:9-10 *“if anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God...”* If you deny Christ and follow the world, you may prosper here for a while but, in the final judgment from God, your soul will be lost.

Verses 12 & 13 provide a strong message of encouragement to God’s faithful. It will require patience, perseverance, and endurance but, in the end, they *“will have rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”*

- **Reaping the Earth's Harvest and the Grapes of Wrath (vs. 14-20):** The time for reaping has come. What will be the harvest? Who is doing the reaping? Is this the final judgment or a severe judgment against a nation or nations? While this judgment is severe, the effect of it is symbolically described as causing blood to rise up to the horses' bridles (vs. 20), it is not the final judgment. The Son of Man (Christ) will lead the final judgment in chapter 19. In this passage He, and His agents (angels), are inflicting great pain, death, and economic disaster on the ungodly nations that persecute His people. This is a prelude to the final judgment. Notice the similarities with 19:15 *"Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."* And Joel 3:12-13 *"Let the nations be wakened and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow – for their wickedness is great."* Those who oppose God must eventually face His wrath.

Chapter Fifteen

- **Prelude to the Bowls of Judgment:** In verse one of chapter fifteen, the Apostle John states that he *"saw another sign in heaven."* This is the third sign that he had seen. In chapter twelve verse one, a great sign appeared revealing the radiant woman (the redeemed of all the ages). In chapter twelve verse three, another sign appeared in heaven and John beheld the fiery red dragon (Satan) who was cast out of heaven. The sign in chapter fifteen is described as *"great and marvelous."* Something great with significant consequences is about to follow. There is also a great sense of finality in this last sign. Seven angels (the number seven representing completeness) have *"seven last plagues."* The seven bowls containing God's wrath, which will be described in chapter sixteen are God's final actions or judgment against mankind. There will be no more warnings. The bowls of wrath are indeed the last plagues.
 - The seven letters – chapters 2 & 3 -- **instruct**
 - The seven seals – chapters 6-8 – **reveal**
 - The seven trumpets – chapters 8-11 – **warn**
 - The seven bowls – chapter 16 – **act** (or execute a final judgment)

Chapter fifteen contains a brief prelude to the bowls of wrath. God's people who had remained faithful and were victorious over the earth beast of paganism, hedonism, and the worship of men, are now singing the victory song of Moses (Exodus 15) and the Lamb (Revelation 5:8-14). This once again unites the voices from both the old covenant and the new covenant in one glorious and harmonious hymn of praise to the Lord God Almighty who has delivered them (and us) from sin and death. The song which they sing (vs. 3 & 4) is a composite of a number of Psalms (92:5; 145:17; 86:9, 98:2). The chapter concludes with one of the four living creatures (chapter 4) giving

the seven angels the seven bowls “full of the wrath of God” and they are charged (16:1) with pouring out the bowls of wrath on the earth.

Chapter Sixteen

- **Pouring Out the First Three Bowls (vs. 1-7):** In verse one, the seven angels are instructed to pour out the wrath of God on the earth. The earth or “earth dwellers” (13:14), are the people of the world, the unregenerate. They are the ones mentioned by Christ in Matthew 7:13 who follow the broad and easy way. They have no time for God. They seek only to please themselves. The Apostle John also spoke of the dangers of loving the world in 1 John 2:15-16 *“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world.”* Those of the world will receive the wrath of God. In verse two, after the first angel pours out the contents of his bowl on the earth, those who worship the world as their God and the Beast from the earth (14:9-10) are stricken with loathsome sores. Calamities, in a very personal nature, fall on those who oppose God. Mankind suffers much when they ignore God. Times may be prosperous for a while but, eventually it will all fall apart without God. All one needs to do is look at the Children of Israel and their history of prosperity (when they were faithful) and pestilence, famine, and ultimately captivity (when they worshipped false Gods). It was no different in the first century and it is no different today. When the second and third bowls are poured out (verses 3-4) calamities fall on the sea, the rivers, and the springs. When considering these bowls, one immediately sees the parallel with the plagues sent on Egypt (Exodus 7:14-25). Pharaoh, a type of beast from the earth, would not humble himself before the one true and all powerful God but continued to insist that he was deity. His pride and arrogance brought terrible disasters on his country but even to the bitter end, he would not truly repent and worship God. Neither would the Scribes and Pharisees, neither would the Caesars and their followers, neither do leaders of great nations today. The end result is no surprise. It is quite predictable. Without God, sin rules and calamities follow. In verses five through seven, God is praised for His righteous judgment. Some will say that God’s judgments are too harsh but they are not. He shows great love and patience with mankind through His instructing and warning. But ultimately His judgment will come and His judgments are *“true and righteous altogether”* (Psalm 19:9).
- **Pouring Out the Second Three Bowls (vs. 8-16):** The fourth and fifth bowls contained calamities of scorching heat and darkness. These terrible judgments did not bring about repentance but, instead blasphemy against God. It seems that men knew from where these calamities were coming (God) but, just like Pharaoh long ago, their hearts were hardened against God and *“they did not repent of their deeds.”* The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates. During the Roman Empire, the Euphrates

formed an eastern boundary for the empire. Beyond the great river were the “*kings from the east.*” Following is a quote from Benjamin Isaac’s history of the Roman Empire.

“The eastern borders changed many times, of which the longest lasting was the [Euphrates](#) river, eventually to be left behind as the Romans defeated their rivals, the [Parthians](#), with the march on their capital, [Susa](#) in 115. The Parthians were a group of [Iranian peoples](#) that ruled most of [Greater Iran](#) that is in modern-day Iran, western Iraq, Armenia and the Caucasus. In 118 [Hadrian](#) decided that it was in Rome’s interest to re-establish the Euphrates as the limit of its direct control. Hadrian returned to the [status quo ante](#), and surrendered the territories of [Armenia](#), [Mesopotamia](#), and [Adiabene](#) to their previous rulers and client-kings and didn’t attempt to romanize the Parthian Empire. “[2]

The Roman Empire would be judged. Satan, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth would face the wrath of God, the day of the Lord. Rome would fall. The mighty empire would face their Armageddon or decisive battle and they would not prevail. What is “Armageddon?” Literally translated from Hebrew, the word means the “Mount of Megiddo.” There are several references to Megiddo in the holy scriptures but the one that is most likely being referenced here is found in 2 Kings 23:29-30. Josiah, one of the truly good kings of Judah, made a very strange decision to fight against Pharaoh Necho and support the king of Assyria in a battle along the Euphrates river at Megiddo (note the similarities to Revelation 16:12-16). It was a decisive battle. Josiah died in the battle and, after his death, the southern kingdom of Judah declined rapidly. The nation of Israel would never again be a great power. Their glory and majesty were gone.

What was the message to Christians in the first and second centuries? A decisive battle, like the one at Megiddo, had been fought and the beasts and the dragon (their master) had been defeated. This was a spiritual battle between God and His forces and Satan and his forces. The results of this battle are described later in chapter 19 verse 19-20:

“And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.” Satan also ultimately meets a similar fate in chapter 20 vs. 10.

What is the message to men today? God still rules among the kingdoms of men and He still judges them. The righteous will prosper and the ungodly will perish. It has been this way in every age and it is no different today.

Look around and listen for the trumpets of warning that always proceed the outpouring of God's wrath.

One final note on King Josiah and his battle at Megiddo: even if you are a very godly person, bad things will happen to you if you associate with bad people. Josiah chose to support a heathen king in a battle he did not need to fight. He chose poorly and it cost him his life. Choose your battles carefully and prayerfully.

- **Pouring Out the Seventh, and Final, Bowl (vs. 17-21):** Considering the severity of the judgments contained in the first six bowls, one can only try to imagine the fierceness of the devastation when this last bowl is poured out on mankind. Seven, of course represents completeness or finality. While this is still not the final judgment on the world (in verse 21 men are still cursing God and complaining), it is the final judgment against Rome. That great ungodly empire has fallen and its fall was an earthshaking event. Tremors were felt well beyond the borders of the empire. History tells us this (the fall of Rome) was not a one-time event but a gradual decline and decay of a once mighty kingdom. Enemies from the north and from the east kept harassing the empire. There was much moral corruption within the empire, inflation was rampant and controlling such a vast range of lands and cultures was a continual struggle. Rome ceased to be the seat of imperial authority under Diocletian (285 AD) who split the Empire and made Nicomedia (in modern day Turkey) his capital and established a co-emperor to rule the west from Rome. This new system of government seemed to work for a while but eventually led to further weakening of the empire and its defenses. Little by little, Rome fell. It died a slow death like a great body afflicted by a cancer. As prophesied in Daniel 2:24-45, during the last of the four mighty kingdoms of men ((Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman), *"God will setup a kingdom that will never be destroyed."* God's church was established during the time of the Roman Empire when Christ was crucified and rose from the dead to rule over His kingdom. Unlike the kingdoms of men, this *"kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever."* Kingdoms of men come and go. God's kingdom is eternal.

Questions for Discussion

1. Compare Psalm 2:6&9 with Revelation 12:5 & 14:1. What are the similarities? Who is ruling with a rod of iron?

2. Who are the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 14:1-3? Are they the same 144,000 that were mentioned in Revelation 7:3-4?
3. What 5 characteristics did these 144,000 have (verses 3-5)?
4. What were the messages of the 3 angels (messengers) in Revelation 14:6-13?
5. Who is the "Son of Man" (14:14-16) and what is He doing?
6. What was the sign that had appeared in 12:1? What was the sign that had appeared in 12:3? What sign is seen here in 15:1?
7. In Revelation, the 7 letters instruct (chapters 2 & 3), the 7 seals reveal (chapters 5-8), and the 7 trumpets warn (chapters 8-11). What do the 7 bowls do (chapters 15 & 16)?
8. What is the cup of God's wrath that is described in Jeremiah 25:15-28?
9. On whom were the bowls containing God's wrath poured out (16:1)?
10. Even though these judgments are harsh (bowls of wrath), are God's judgments righteous (16:7)?

11. Did these righteous judgments from God (16:8-11) bring men to repent?

12. What does Armageddon mean literally?

13. What famous king of Judah died in a battle in the area of Megiddo?

14. What other decisive battles had been fought in this area around Mt. Carmel, Mt. Gilboa, and Megiddo? See Judges 4; Joshua 7; 2 Kings 9; 2 Kings 23.

15. The results of the battle of Armageddon are described in Revelation 19. Who fought this battle? Who won?

Making Application

Regardless of where you live (any country on earth) and regardless of the year, look around at society, government, and religion. Are you living among Godly people? Is God's word referenced and respected? Do the political leaders look to God for guidance or is He rarely, if ever, mentioned? Do the religious leaders humbly follow God's word or do they endlessly pontificate with their own "wisdom," doctrines and laws? If a nation plays the harlot and is unfaithful to God, it is doomed. It may not happen today or tomorrow or the next day but eventually the wrath of God will be poured out on it. Look around you. Do you hear trumpets warning against the judgment to come?

Revelation

Lesson Nine

The Great Harlot; The Fall of Babylon

“How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

David
2 Samuel 1:27

Lesson Goal:

To properly interpret the images found in chapters 17 & 18 and make application.

Text:

Revelation 17 & 18

Introduction and Commentary

To this point we have journeyed with the Apostle John through many dramatic scenes in this amazing revelation. We have seen the triumphant Christ (the alpha and omega) in chapter one instruct John to write down what he saw. In chapters two and three we saw short but powerful letters written by Christ and addressed to seven churches. The letters were to instruct, encourage, and warn. In chapters four and five we (through John) were allowed to see the most dramatic scene in all of scripture (the throne of God) and the single most important event in the history of mankind (the Lamb worthy to take the scroll from the hand of God). We have seen the impact on mankind as the Lamb of God opened the seven seals which secured the scroll. Sadly, instead of rejoicing, the opening of the seals caused great tribulation and men hid themselves from God. We also saw those who were martyred for their faith. They cried out to God for justice and were assured that justice would come in due time. Following the opening of the seals we saw the effects on mankind when the seven trumpets of warning sounded. The trumpets warned of the judgment which would come in the form of bowls containing the wrath of God. But before God's wrath was poured out on mankind, we saw a woman, a child and a dragon in a great conflict. The dragon was determined to kill both the woman and her child but God protected them and delivered them from the dragon. Though defeated in his quest, the dragon did not go away but rather found two great allies in the forms of beasts: a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. These dreadful creatures caused great harm to God's faithful and led mankind further away from God in their pursuit of paganism and hedonism. And finally, in chapter sixteen, we witnessed the pouring out of God's wrath against the people of the earth. There will be no more warnings. The final judgment has started and it will end with all of God's enemies being cast into the lake of fire but, before that final scene of judgment, we will be witnesses (through the eyes of John) to the destruction of a mighty foe: the great harlot.

There have been many views on who/what the harlot represents: the Roman Catholic church, the unfaithful members of God's church, the city of Jerusalem, the city of Rome and/or the Roman Empire. Reasoned arguments can be made for each of these

but, when taken in the larger context of the Revelation, I believe this great harlot is the city of Rome. And, following the theme of Revelation, even Rome is symbolic. Rome represents all that is worldly: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The judgment was not just against Rome but against all peoples and nations that ignore God and pursue their own pleasures.

Two women and two cities play prominent roles in the second part of Revelation:

- The radiant woman and the beloved city.
- The great harlot and the city of Rome

We studied the radiant woman in chapter twelve. Now we find the great harlot in chapters seventeen and eighteen and the contrast between the two women could not be greater.

Chapter Seventeen

- **The Great Harlot and the Scarlet Beast (vs. 1-6):** One of the seven angels who had poured out the bowls of wrath, invites John to behold another sight: a great harlot. Before taking John away “in the Spirit”, the angel says a few things about the harlot. She “sits on many waters.” The waters are explained later in verse 15 as “people, multitudes, nations, and tongues.” This is consistent with how the symbol of waters (or seas) is often used in scripture. The harlot had tremendous power over much of the world. She had great influence over the powerful (the kings of the earth) and seduced them to commit fornication with her. They chose to become unfaithful to their own people in order to enjoy the pleasures of the harlot for a season. And even the common people (the earth dwellers... see comments on 16:1) became intoxicated with the harlot’s lies, sensuality, and earthly pleasures. We are all tempted with carnality. One does not need to hold a high office in order to feel the pull of fleshly lust: power, greed, and pleasure. Rome had a strong and terrible hold on the morals of all who came under her influence.

In verses three and four we see the harlot (who was clothed in purple and scarlet, the colors of royalty and blood) sitting on (or being supported by) a scarlet beast (a beast covered in blood). This is not the first time we have seen this beast that has seven heads and ten horns. We first saw it in chapter thirteen verse one: “Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns...” (see also Daniel 7:7). This scarlet beast is the Roman Empire, the fourth of the great empires described in the book of Daniel. The city of Rome gained its strength from the powerful Roman Empire. If not for the empire the city (the harlot) would have no strength or beauty or appeal. The commerce that was the source of Rome’s wealth came from the merchants and seamen who brought goods and riches from the far regions of the vast empire. Many became wealthy through the conquests of the Roman Empire. As a result, the harlot was finely arrayed with jewels and all the trappings of wealth and royalty. She had a golden cup from which she drank and became drunk (verses four through six). The cup was “full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.” When reading this, one cannot help but think of the lengthy list of abominations and sins the Apostle Paul listed in his letter to the church at Rome: “Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of

their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Romans 1:24-32). Not surprisingly, God's people, being separate and apart from this corrupt society, often became the target of persecution. "the woman became drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (see also the saints under the altar in 6:9-11).

In the scriptures, four cities are labeled as harlots and Rome is a composite of all four.

- Nineveh – Nahum 3:4-7
 - A harlot of power and conquest
- Babylon – Isaiah 47:5-10
 - A mistress given to pleasure
- Tyre – Isaiah 23:15-17
 - A harlot of commerce
- Jerusalem – Isaiah 1:21-22
 - A religious harlot

The woman (Rome) is given a name: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth." Every wickedness resides in her.

- **The Meaning of the Woman and the Beast (vs. 7-18):** As John stood marveling at the sight of the harlot the angel was surprised. "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her." The angel's explanation is detailed and it uses much symbolism. Many interpretations have been set forth. Let's take a look at the angel's explanation verse by verse.
 - Verse 8: "The beast that you saw"
 - "Was." The beast, the Roman Empire (see the explanation above and 13:1) once was powerful.
 - "Is Not." The fall of the Roman Empire.
 - "Will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to destruction." Will go from the bottomless pit (which is temporary) to eternal destruction in the lake of fire (19:20). The bottomless pit is first mentioned in 9:1-2 when the fifth trumpet sounded. In chapter 11 verse 7, this same beast makes war against God's witnesses,

overcomes them and kills them. Men will marvel at the fall of this mighty empire/beast.

- Verse 9: “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.” The beast upon which the woman sits (verse 3) has seven heads and ten horns. What do they represent? As with most of the numbers in Revelation, the number seven is not likely literal but symbolic. Seven is a complete or perfect number. Mountains are majestic and awe inspiring. In the eyes of man, the Roman Empire was the ultimate in power, awe, and majesty. The ten horns are explained in verse 12.
- Verse 10: “There are also seven kings.” What do these kings represent? Many choose to tie the identification of these kings to literal rulers (Caesars) of Rome. This may very well be correct but I take a different view. Since the beast (the Roman Empire) “is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven,” (vs. 11) it does not appear that the seven kings are individuals but great powers or forces of evil. Five have fallen or no longer exist. One could speculate about the great kingdoms of men that had existed prior to the coming of Christ: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece. But this is only speculation. One of the kings (or great powers) is. This would indicate that the power currently existed at the time of this revelation to John. Is this the Roman Empire? In verse 11 the beast is identified as one of the seven but it is also numbered separately as the eighth. This special designation for the Roman Empire seems to indicate its great power above all the other kingdoms. Although it is numbered with the others, it is also separate. “...and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others” (Daniel 2:40). There remains one more king: “...the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.” Who or what might this be? Would there be another empire after the Roman Empire? While there have been empires after Rome, the prophecies found in Daniel end with the Roman Empire when Christ’s kingdom (His church) is established: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all of these kingdoms and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44). I suggest that the seventh king which was to come and continue for a short time was/is Satan and his diabolical rule over the hearts of men. He continues even today with his lies and deceit but his time is short. In chapter six verse eleven the martyrs for Christ were told to rest for “a little while” and judgment against evil would come. In chapter twenty verse three it is told that Satan must be released to tempt and torment men “for a little while.” Satan is in his final “short time” before he is cast into the lake of fire (20:10) which will be his eternal abode. However, during this time, his evil power continues to rule over many and will continue to be felt until Christ returns and this earth is no more.
- Verse 11: This is the beast from verse eight (see explanation above).

- Verses 12-14: The angel continues to explain to John the meaning of the woman and the beast that carries her (verses 3 and 7). In other words, the woman and the beast are not literal but what do they represent (what is the symbolism)? The symbolism of the seven heads was explained in verses nine through eleven. Now the angel tells the meaning of the ten horns. In scripture horns are symbols of power and might. These ten kings have significant power but it only comes through their alliance with the beast, the Roman Empire, and their time of power is very brief. "...but they received authority for one hour as kings with the beast." These kings have alliances with the beast which makes the beast even stronger. "These are of one mind and they will give their power and authority to the beast" (verse 13). The ten kings also join with the Roman Empire (the beast) in opposing God's kingdom and making war with the Lamb. However, their victories will be short-lived. The Lamb will be victorious for He is "Lord of lords and King of kings."
- Verses 15-18: In a final twist of fate, these ten kings utterly destroy the harlot (Rome) and make her desolate. The actual city may remain (and it does) but it's power and glory and all that made it so desirable are gone. We will see in chapter eighteen the effect this had on commerce and those who made their money satisfying Rome's insatiable appetite for things.

Chapter Eighteen

- **The Fall of the Harlot (vs. 1-8):** In these verses another angel proclaims that Babylon has fallen. This exact phrase was found in chapter fourteen verse eight when one of three angels proclaimed the doom of the city and those who became drunk on her hedonism and the worship of false Gods. This phrase is also found in Isaiah 21:9 when God warned of the fall of the ancient city of Babylon. There are many similarities between Rome (the Babylon of the book of Revelation) and the ancient city of Babylon (compare Revelation 18:7 with Isaiah 47:5-10). God's people are warned to "come out of her" (verses four and five). This warning is similar to the warning given to Lot and his family to "get up and get out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city" (Genesis 19:12-14) before Sodom and Gomorrah were utterly destroyed. Here in Revelation, the Christians may not have needed to physically remove themselves from Rome but they were to separate themselves from the sin and corruption that were rampant. They were to be "in the world but not of the world" (see John 17:14-16). This charge for God's people has not changed.
- **The World Mourns and Heaven Rejoices (vs. 9-24):** When Rome falls it causes tremors through most of the world. Notice the ones affected:
 - The kings of the earth (vs. 9-10). These were the same kings mentioned in 17:2 who "committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her." Their lavish lifestyles were coming to an end. Unlike Moses (Hebrews 11:25), they chose to "enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" and now the party was over. They were left to weep and lament.
 - The merchants of the earth (vs. 11-16). The love of money can cause much corruption (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Rome was not only a great military power but, due to its vast reaches, the empire was also a great commercial

force that generated tremendous wealth through the buying and selling of goods. When one places their faith in “uncertain riches” the likelihood of being disappointed is very great. The one whose treasure is in heaven does not have this concern (Matthew 6:19-21).

- The shipmasters and sailors (vs. 17-20). And how did all of these goods get to Rome? How did the kings and merchants satisfy Rome’s insatiable appetite for exotic goods from Egypt and the East and regions beyond? These goods primarily came to Rome via ships that navigated the Mediterranean Sea. There was a virtual highway on this massive body of water that was constantly filled with ships transporting goods all driven by the wealth that Rome supplied. There is a ripple effect when a mighty center of trade collapses. Those who own the ships, those who captain the ships, and the crews on the ships are devastated. Most of their ships will now sit idle. Their fortunes are gone. They stand at a distance “weeping and wailing.”

In verses ten, seventeen, and nineteen the phrase “one hour” is used to describe how quickly these things will happen. God is infinite and eternal. When He includes measures of time in His word it is for our benefit. In the big scheme of things, Rome’s power and grandeur was very brief. For the kings of the earth: “in one hour your judgment has come.” For the merchants: “in one hour such great riches came to nothing.” For the shipmasters and sailors: “They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’” God’s judgment on peoples and nations comes in His time and as He has determined. It may seem that God is far away and does not see all the evil perpetrated by men but He is present and sees and His judgments are true and righteous altogether (Psalm 19:9). In the judgment against Rome, He sends a clear message “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). There is much weeping and wailing among men as Rome falls, but quite noticeably (in verse 20) there are some who are rejoicing (see 6:10-11). The remaining verses in chapter eighteen (twenty one through twenty four) describe a city that has been abandoned. The streets are still there and the buildings still exist. People inhabit the city but its life, its vitality, and its substance are all gone. When Diocletian in 285 AD split the Roman Empire into two parts: the east governed out of Byzantium (later Constantinople) and the west governed from Rome, the balance of power shifted dramatically. Rome no longer was the center of wealth and power. More and more the power shifted east and Rome’s decline was dramatic. It became a shell of its former glory and finally was conquered by Germanic tribes.

The four mighty kingdoms of men prophesied in Daniel have come to an end. They no longer exist. God’s kingdom the one formed without hands (not of man), during the time of these kingdoms remains and is victorious. “It shall break in pieces and consume all of these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 7:44).

Revelation Lesson Ten *Victory!*

“...If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Romans 8:31

Lesson Goal:

To understand the events described in chapter nineteen of Revelation and make the proper application.

Text:

Revelation 19

Introduction and Commentary

When I was a child my heroes on the big screen and on the Saturday morning television shows were the cowboys with white hats who rode in on white horses to save the day. When all hope seemed lost they would arrive to rescue the abused and downtrodden while properly dispatching the bad guys. This is a theme and a story that never grows old. I believe God has given all of us a sense of justice; a sense of right and wrong. We naturally want to see right prevail and to see justice served. Little did I know at that time that the theme of a hero riding on a white horse was from the Bible. The origin of all that is good can be traced to God, even a children’s story with a hero on a white horse. Actually, given the innocence, kindness, and sincerity of children this isn’t at all surprising. Children look for the good, trust in the good, and rejoice when good wins. With age, and Satan’s constant influence, the adult loses the child’s wonder and amazement and becomes cynical. How sad. Every day, regardless of age, should be a wonder to behold, embrace, and savor. Oh to recapture the goodness and purity of childhood.

We first saw Christ (our hero and our Savior) on a white horse in chapter six verse two. After He had opened the first seal, armed with righteousness and salvation, he went out on a white horse to conquer Satan and his forces. Now, in chapter nineteen verse eleven, He once again appears riding on a white horse. And, as in chapter six, he is leading a battle against evil and unrighteousness. The difference is that this will be the final battle between Christ and the forces of good and Satan and the forces of evil. There will be no more battles. The victor in this decisive battle will rule forever. For the loser there will be no more re-grouping or recovering to fight again. The loser will be vanquished forever to a *“lake of fire burning with brimstone.”* Through the eyes of John, let’s observe this final battle of good versus evil. With the innocence of a child, let’s stand in awe as our savior on a white horse defeats all that is ungodly, impure, unrighteous, and evil and banishes it to eternal damnation.

Chapter Nineteen

- **Heaven Rejoices (vs. 1-6):** All of heaven is rejoicing over the defeat of Rome the Harlot. They are rejoicing because *“He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.”* Recall the voice of the martyrs in chapter six verse ten as they cried out for justice. Justice has been served and the harlot is no more. God, in His time, makes all things right. He truly is the righteous judge. It is an inspiring scene involving all of the hosts of heaven described in chapters four and five: a great multitude, the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures. They are all praising God and bowing down before Him. Their praises are so overwhelming that a phrase from chapter one verse fifteen is used again to describe the sound *“as the sound of many waters.”* If you have stood next to a mighty waterfall, you get the picture. *“Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”*
- **Preparations for the Marriage of the Lamb and His Bride (vs. 7-10):** The Lamb from chapter five verses five through eight is about to marry. What a stark contrast from being slain, to being resurrected and becoming a king, and now to share His joy and glory with his bride. *“And we know that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord, to those who are the called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). In earthly terms, no matter how great a man becomes, his fullness will only be reached through sharing and loving another. Through marriage. Who is the bride? Who is the one so honored to be joined to one so holy? In Ephesians 5:22-27 the bride of Christ is clearly identified as His church. He gave Himself completely to His bride. He died for the church. His life of selflessness and love is the example for every husband to follow. Preparations are being made for the marriage but the marriage has not yet occurred (the actual marriage is in chapter 21). Why the emphasis on preparation? It is the only way we can be part of the marriage. We must be prepared. In Matthew 22, Christ told a parable about a wedding feast. Many were invited but few came. Even, among those who came, some were not prepared. There was a man who came without a wedding garment. When confronted, he had no excuse. Neither will we. Here, in Revelation, the bride wears fine linen which *“is the righteous acts of the saints.”* The bride of Christ (the church) is made up of disciples who practice their faith and keep themselves pure. Those who take part in this wedding will be prepared. Similarly, in Matthew 25, Christ told a parable about ten virgins. Five were prepared when the bridegroom came and five were not. It is easy to think that one has plenty of time to prepare for Christ’s return but one must approach every day as though it were the day of the Lord. We must be prepared.
- **The Ultimate Victory in Christ (vs. 11-21):** In verses eleven through sixteen we see Christ and His armies prepared for battle. The battle they fought was not physical but spiritual. The unseen forces of darkness were a terrible foe. And, although Satan was defeated and bound (20:2) he now is released on earth for a short time (20:3 and 12:12). This is our battle today as described in Ephesians 6:11-12 *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against*

principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Those who would make this battle physical, limit the scope of this terrible conflict. There was no physical battle in the valley of Megiddo with blood “*up to the horses’ bridles*” (14:20), but the fierceness of the spiritual battle was just as vivid and intense. It should be clear also that there will be no future battle in the ancient land of Israel. Christ reigns today as King over all (1:5). He has conquered Satan and established His kingdom. All that remains is for Him to return and receive His bride. Note the four names given to Christ in this passage:

- **Faithful and True** (vs. 11)
 - Christ also used this name when writing to the church at Laodicea. He was (and is) faithful in all things and what He says is true. There is no wavering or changing with Him.
- **A name that no one knew but Himself** (vs. 12)
 - “Only the Son of God can understand the mystery of His own Being.” Swete⁴ For all of His greatness and majesty, there is still much we do not know about the Son of God.
- **The Word of God** (vs. 13)
 - Only the Apostle John uses the designation “Word” when describing Christ (John 1:1,14; 1 John 1:1). Christ completely and clearly communicates the mind of God to mankind.
- **King of Kings and Lord of Lords** (vs. 16)
 - This is the ultimate description of our savior. Through the history of man there have been many Kings and many Lords but Christ reigns over all of them. He wears many crowns or diadems (vs. 12). Satan wore seven diadems (12:3) and the beast from the sea wore ten (13:1) but there is no limit to Christ’s power, authority, and royalty. He is truly Lord of all.

The great battle is not described but verses seventeen through twenty-one provide a vivid description of its aftermath. Those warring against Christ and His armies were:

- The beast (the sea-beast from chapter 13)
- The kings of the earth
- The false prophet

Two of these foes, the sea-beast (the Roman Empire) and the false prophet (Emperor worship or paganism, also referred to as the earth-beast in chapter 13) were defeated and cast into the lake of fire. The “rest” (the kings of the earth) were slain “*with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse.*” This is not the sword of God’s word which is mentioned in Hebrews 4:12 and Ephesians 6:17. Rather this is the sword of judgment which was foretold in Isaiah 11:4 and Psalm 2:9. The nations are being punished. God rules among the nations of men. “*Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations and He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.*” (Revelation 19:15). The kings of the earth are doomed. They too eventually will be cast into the lake of fire (20:15).

Questions for Discussion

1. Great rejoicing in heaven is described in 19:1-6. What was the occasion for this rejoicing?
2. Two women have been mentioned so far in Revelation. One is the harlot (chapters 17 & 18) whose judgment is described here in 19:2. The other woman was the radiant woman “*a woman clothed with the sun...*” from 12:1. Who/what did these women represent?
3. A third woman is introduced in 19:7-8. Who is she?
4. In Revelation 19:7-9, the preparation for the marriage between Christ and His church is described. Has this marriage taken place or is it still to come (see Matthew 1:18-20; Matthew 22:1-1; Matthew 25:1-13; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27).
5. According to the Hebrew custom, how binding was a betrothal? How is this different from our modern custom of an engagement prior to marriage?
6. The word diadem (crown) is used in verse 12. Christ wears many diadems. Where else in Revelation is the word “diadem” used and who is wearing the diadems in those passages?
7. What are the 4 names given to Christ in 19:11-16? What is the significance of each of these names?

8. The results of a great battle are described in 19:17-21. Was/is this the battle of Armageddon? Was/is the battle of Armageddon a physical battle or a spiritual battle?

9. Is the “sharp sword” (verse 15) the conquering gospel or judgment against the nations? Consider Psalm 2, Psalm 110, Isaiah 11:4-5, Micah 5:15, Isaiah 63:1-6, and Joel 3:12-13.

10. Verses 17-18 in chapter 19 describe the aftermath of the battle of Armageddon. Compare this description to Ezekiel’s prophecy found in Ezekiel 39:17-20.

Making Application

Does all the evil in the world ever start to weigh you down? Are there times when you think the bad will prevail and all of your labor for good is in vain? I think we all have days when evil and wickedness seem insurmountable. Satan’s forces among men are active and terrible but they are also defeated. Our faith is not in our flesh or in the goodness of men. Our hope can only come from above from the One who is perfect and holy and truly good. Look to Him during the dark days. *“Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and lean not on your own understanding”* (Proverbs 2:5). Try it and you will find peace even during the most violent storms of life.

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Revelation

Lesson Eleven

The Final Judgment

*“For nothing is secret that will not be revealed,
nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light.”*

Luke 8:17

Lesson Goal:

To understand the final judgment as described in Revelation and most particularly the who and when.

Text:

Revelation 20

Introduction and Commentary

I like watching episodes of the old television program “Columbo.” Actually, there are not many current television shows or movies that interest me so, if I am looking to relax and be entertained, I will search for old programs. Columbo is one of my favorites. At the beginning of each episode a murder is committed. Unlike modern shows, the murder scene is not graphic. There is no blood or carnage but a murder takes place and we (the viewers) are witnesses. The remainder of the show is about how Lieutenant Columbo will solve the case and catch the murderer. Of course, he is always successful. It is fascinating to see the lengths to which people will go to not only plan their crime but also to cover it up. Lies and deceit are everywhere but in the end the truth comes out.

On a much grander stage and with consequences most of us cannot grasp, we too one day will be judged. Our lives and all of our acts, both good and bad, will be laid bare before the one who created us. It does not matter how convincing our lies have been or how elaborate our schemes to cover up and hide our evil works, the truth will come out when we stand before God. When Christ addressed the seven churches in chapters two and three of Revelation, He used the phrase *“I know your works”* in each of the letters. There is nothing hidden from God. He knows. Man may be tricked and misled but not God. He knows. This should be a very sobering thought. But, in order to do as they please, many have the attitude of the wicked found in Psalm 10:10-12

*“So he crouches, he lies low, that the helpless may fall by his strength.
He has said in his heart, ‘God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see’
Arise, O Lord! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble.
Why do the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart,
‘You will not require an account.’”*

But God will require an account. There will come a day when all accounts are settled. That day is described in Revelation chapter twenty. The judgment begins with the greatest liar and deceiver of all: Satan (see John 8:44) and continues until all are judged both “*small or great*” (vs. 12). No exceptions. We all have an appointment to keep “*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). And, whether we are prepared for the appointment or not, it will be kept.

Lieutenant Columbo always solved the crime. In each episode he methodically and in his unassuming way carefully connected each piece of the puzzle until the murderer was caught in his trap. However, I often wondered, what happened when the perpetrator went to trial? Did a sharp lawyer find a loop-hole that allowed the murderer to go free? Was some key piece of evidence thrown out at the trial? In the court systems today, one is left to wonder. But, when each of us stands before God, there will be no trickery. Truth and justice will prevail. Let’s consider the final judgment.

Chapter Twenty

- **Satan Bound (vs. 1-3):** When responding to the accusations of the Pharisees that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Matthew 12:22-30), Christ said that would mean Satan would be fighting against Satan and that made no sense. He went on to say that the only way one could plunder a strong man’s house is to first of all bind the strong man. This is exactly what Christ did with Satan as He lived a sinless life. Satan’s power over man has always been sin and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Try as he might, Satan could never get his stinger of sin into Christ and ultimately this was Christ’s victory. When He went to the cross sinless, Satan was defeated. The grave could not hold Him because, being sinless, He was not beholden to death. “*O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Through His resurrection from the grave, He crushed Satan’s head (Genesis 3:15). Satan is securely bound today but he has not yet been cast into the lake of fire. With his limited but substantial power, he still roams the earth seeking those whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8) and waiting his final and inevitable judgment.

We know that Christ has bound Satan but what is this thousand years? Much is made of the thousand years mentioned in verses two through seven although that appears to be a minor subtheme in this passage. The primary themes clearly are: the binding of Satan and the victory of the saints. One should also be very cautious to attach literal meaning to this number at the end of the revelation when most of the numbers throughout the apocalypse have been symbolic e.g. 42 months (11:2), 666 (13:18), time and times and half a time (12:14), one thousand two hundred and sixty days (11:3 and 12:6), 144,000 (7:4 and 14:1), etc. A few thoughts on the thousand years:

- Verses 1-3: An angel (an agent of God) binds Satan, and casts him into the bottomless pit which was first mentioned in 9:1. The interpretation of these verses are tied directly to the end of chapter 19 (verses 17-21) and it would greatly aid our study if those who divided the chapters and verses had included them with chapter 19. At the conclusion of chapter 19, the aftermath of the battle of Armageddon is described. The beast (the Roman

Empire) and the False Prophet (The Roman Emperors espousing paganism) were cast into the lake of fire (verse 20). This was their final judgment. “The rest” (the kings of the earth and their armies) were killed but their final judgment would come later (20:13). But what about Satan? What about that great Dragon (12:9) who was the power behind the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Harlot? What was his fate as a result of Christ’s victory in this great battle against evil? Was he also judged and cast into the lake of fire? The first three verses of chapter twenty tells us what happened to him as a result of the battle of Armageddon. He was bound and his powers greatly diminished but his final judgment would come later (20:10). In his commentary on Revelation, Homer Hailey uses an analogy to describe the binding of Satan “He walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8); but his activity is limited, as a dog chained to a wire between two trees. He can operate only within the limited distance between the trees, and to the length of the chain from side to side. In this binding, Satan is divinely restrained from reestablishing control over nations.”¹ He would also be allowed one final but brief period of time (“*a little while*”) to recruit new allies to deceive and corrupt mankind (verses 7-10). What part do the thousand years play in this? Satan’s powers have been limited for a long period of time (symbolically a thousand years) while Christ reigns over His church. In fact, only at the end of this age will he be released from these bonds for a little while (verses 7-8). I like Carl McMurray’s explanation (from his commentary *From Beneath the Altar*). “As long as the gospel is proclaimed Satan’s power is hindered, he is bound. After the last person is saved (a time that only God can know) and the gospel has no more effect on this world, then Satan will be loosed. He will be loosed because there will be no proclaiming of the word to bind him. He will be rampant for a little while. Then, since there are no saved to continue this earth for, God will destroy it finally.”² In other words, Satan will only be loosed when the gospel is no longer being preached and there is no more “salt” on the earth. Without the gospel and the influence of Christ, mankind follows his own ways to his moral and physical destruction. Satan runs rampant. Then God will destroy the earth. It has always been this way e.g. during the time of Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah, idolatrous Israel, etc. Further consideration of the thousand years will be included in the following sections.

- **The Two Resurrections (vs. 4-6):**

- Verse 4: In verse four John saw “thrones.” We are not told how many thrones nor are we told who sat on them but “*judgment was committed to them.*” They were to sit in judgment. In 1 Corinthians 6:2-3, the saints are told that they will sit in judgment of the world. They/we are reigning with Christ and will reign until the end of time. During this time of Satan’s bondage, the saints (Christ’s faithful) are reigning with Christ. “*And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*” This is not

some future reign. It is a present-day reign. The kingdom (Christ's church) began when He sat down at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:20-23; Revelation 5). The thousand years represents an extended period of time. It is not a brief period as man measures time (see 2 Peter 3:8). Those reigning with Christ during this time includes those who were martyred (6:9-10) and had cried out for justice.

- Verses 5-6: *"The rest of the dead"* are those not mentioned in verse 4. They are the unredeemed who choose to worship Satan and his agents (the beast). When they die they will find no comfort (Luke 16:19-31). They will simply wait for the judgment when they will *"live again"* in eternal punishment and separation from God (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:11-15). Resurrection represents a new life. The Christian puts on a new life when he/she is baptized. *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:3-4). This is the first resurrection which is mentioned here in verses 5 and 6. We once were dead in our sins and our trespasses but now we are made whole/clean through the blood of Jesus our Lord. *"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power..."* The second death is described in verses 14-15. It is the fate of anyone whose name is not found written in the Book of Life. It is the final, and eternal, separation from God. Those who have partaken of the first resurrection are reigning with Christ in His kingdom today. They are reigning as part of His church during the thousand years when Satan is bound by Christ and His gospel. Christ is ruling today! His kingdom has been established and His faithful followers are ruling with Him as priests. See 1 Peter 2:9; Mark 9:1; Colossians 1:13. Don't wait for some future earthly reign of a thousand years. That is a figment of man's imagination. Reign today! Partake of the blessings of our glorious King and His marvelous Kingdom. His church! The first resurrection occurs when we bury the old man in baptism and rise from the watery grave to a new life, the second resurrection occurs when our spirits rise from the grave of physical death and we are given a new body that will be immortal (see John 5:28-29; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Revelation 20:12-13).
- **Gog and Magog (vs. 7-10):**
 - Satan is now released (see above explanation on verses 1-3). His final battle is futile. Those faithful few (there is still a remnant like in the time of Noah and his family; Lot and his family) are now greatly out-numbered by Satan and his allies but God has never been impressed by numbers and the size of armies (see Gideon's 300 in Judges 7). Satan is doomed.
 - Who are Gog and Magog? It is popular today (in the 21st century) to say that Gog represents a specific country e.g. Russia. While this may sound intriguing and make the imagery more "real" for us today, does it really fit and is it consistent with the rest of God's message? It is good to recall the

three rules for studying the book of Revelation that were mentioned at the end of the first lesson.

- What did the book mean to the people of that day to whom it was written?
 - An understanding of the Old Testament prophets (particularly Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah) will help us to understand the symbols and signs used in Revelation.
 - All interpretations of Revelation must be consistent and harmonious with the remainder of the New Testament. There must be no conflict or contradiction between the two.
- The only other mention of Gog from the land of Magog is found in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39. In these chapters Gog is described as a mighty force assembled to come against God's people. The end of chapter 37 is Messianic and the theme of spiritual Israel being attacked by worldly forces continues in chapters 38 and 39. Gog is not a specific, single foe. Rather Gog is all the forces of evil that come together to destroy God's people. Note especially the description of the final victory and defeat of Gog which is described in chapter 38 verses 17-20 and compare it to Revelation 19:17-21. Much of it is identical; word for word. Revelation is describing the defeat of the forces of evil that were attacking God's people during Roman rule (the beast and the false prophet). Ezekiel's account is a foretelling of this great persecution and its ultimate defeat. I agree with Hailey that Gog from the land of Magog represents any and all heathen/pagan forces that war against God. "God said that He had spoken of Gog's coming, but no prophet ever named Gog or Magog. Yet the prophets foretold over and over of the heathen enemies who would come against Israel and who would be defeated and destroyed by His hand. Therefore, we conclude that Gog of the land of Magog symbolized all the heathen enemies of God's people from the time of the prophets to the Roman Empire, all who sought to thwart His purpose and to destroy His king."² If Gog from the land of Magog symbolizes all the heathen enemies of God's people, who/what are these enemies today? Just look around. Who/what is attacking God's people today? It is: materialism, human philosophy, evolution, indifferent churches, atheism, communism. This is the paganism of our day.
- **The Final Judgment (vs 11-15):**
 - In verse 10 Satan was judged and sentenced to eternal punishment (along with the beast and the false prophet – 19:20). Now (beginning in verse 11) all "small and great" stand before God and give an account. There are no exceptions. God has breathed into each of us a spirit, the breath of life, and when our spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7) He will require an account (Hebrews 9:27).
 - I would like for us to give special note to three things in these verses: the books, the sea, and Hades.
 - "...and the books were opened." What are these books?

- Albertus Pieters in his book The Lamb, The Woman, and The Dragon describes the books in this way: “The books evidently stand for the omniscience of God the Judge, to whom nothing is unknown, and by whom nothing is forgotten. He needs no actual record books or files. This feature of the vision is taken from human necessity, and helps to make the certainty of an accurate and just judgment plain to our minds.”³
- I believe this is a fair description of the scene and the significance of the books. Books, to humans, represent knowledge. God has all knowledge. There is nothing hidden from his sight. As Christ declared to each of the seven churches (chapters 2 & 3), “*I know...*”
- “*And another book was opened*” There is something very important about this book, the book of life. The knowledge it contains is very specific. God knows those who are His and they have life as opposed to death (which is separation from God). “*...this is the second death*” (vs. 14). The first death happens when our spirits are separated from our bodies and return to God. The second death happens to those who are separated from God eternally. “*And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire*” (vs. 15).
- Sea
 - If taken literally, as oceans and other great bodies of water on the earth, it seems a little odd to include the sea with Death and Hades. The souls of those who have died at sea are already in the Hadean world. It does not matter where on earth one dies, God is there (Psalm 139:7-12). In chapter 13:1 the beast (the Roman Empire) “*rose up out of the sea.*” We interpreted this to be the mass of human society. This interpretation of the word “sea” is consistent with how the word is used in Daniel 7:2-4 “*Daniel spoke, saying ‘I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven (see Revelation 7:1) were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.*” To remain consistent, the word “sea” found here in verse thirteen should be interpreted symbolically and not literally. It represents that mass of humanity that is alive at the time of Christ’s return. They will be judged according to their works along with those who have preceded them in death.
- Hades
 - The word Hades in the New Testament corresponds to the Hebrew word Sheol found in the Old Testament. The Hadean world is a temporary place where souls abide until

the final judgment found here in Revelation 20. It is briefly described by Christ in Luke 17:19-31 as having two parts: Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4) and Paradise (Luke 23:43) which are separated by a great gulf. In the New Testament, Death and Hades are always used together. When one dies their soul goes to Hades. In Revelation 1:18 Christ said that He had the “*keys of Hades and of Death.*” No longer would the fear of death and the unseen rule over mankind. Christ has conquered them and is ruling at the right hand of God. These great enemies of mankind are finally defeated forever. “*Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*” As the commentator Henry Alford stated so eloquently “As there is a second higher life, so there is also a second and deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death, so after that death there is no more life.”⁴

Questions for Discussion

1. Had Christ bound Satan when He arose from the grave (1:18)? And, as a result of His resurrection, does He now have the keys (control over) Hades and death?
2. Since Satan could not hold Christ (had no power over Him), does it stand to reason that he would try to destroy the work of Jesus? Explain.
3. Is the thousand years (verse 2 & 3) literal or symbolic? If symbolic, what does it represent?
4. Is the resurrection mentioned in verses 5 & 6 literal or symbolic? If symbolic, what does it represent?
5. Are the souls who had been beheaded/slain for the cause of Christ (verse 4) the same souls mentioned in chapter 6 verses 9-10? Why or why not?

6. What New Testament verses teach that all faithful Christians today are reigning with Christ?

7. What will happen to Satan after the thousand years?

8. If Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38 & 39 were all the heathen powers that had come against God's people (and were going to be destroyed by Jehovah), what were the Gog and Magog found in Revelation 20?

9. Are Gog and Magog present today (is there still battle raging)? If so, what are Gog and Magog today?

10. Has there always been a faithful remnant of God's people?

11. What are the 2 resurrections described in Revelation 20?

12. What is the "beloved city" mentioned in 20:9? See also Hebrews 12:22.

13. Who or what was cast into the lake of fire in chapters 19 & 20?

14. How long will the torment of Satan go on?

15. What might the word “sea” used in 20:13 and 21:1 represent besides a literal ocean?

Making Application

Judgment is coming for all of us. One day our souls will return to God our Creator and He will require an account of our deeds. This does not need to be a fearful thing. It should be a joyous occasion but it will only be joyous if we stand before God clothed in spotless garments. And the only way our garments can be spotless is if they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Remember the old gospel hymn:

“Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? Are you washed in the blood of the blood? Are you washed... in the blood... in the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb? Are your garments spotless are they white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?”

How about you? Have you put on Christ through baptism? Have you allowed His blood to wash away your sins and to be clothed in righteousness not your own? Do not delay. *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,”* (Hebrews 9:27)

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Revelation

Lesson Twelve

The New Heaven and New Earth

*“Nevertheless we, according to His promise,
look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”*

2 Peter 3:13

Lesson Goal:

To better understand the new Jerusalem, the final warnings and the wonders to come

Text:

Revelation 21 & 22

Introduction and Commentary

How should God conclude His message to mankind? Should He go into great detail about the world to come after all creation has been judged? If He did this, we certainly would not be able to comprehend much. Our minds and our points of reference are limited to the finite world we live in. That which is to come is obviously infinite. Time is no more. The earth no longer exists. The heavens, as we see them today over the earth, are gone. The physical bodies that house our souls disappear with the earth and heavens. All is made new. So, in fact, God (through the inspired pen of the Apostle John) concludes not only the Revelation but the entirety of His Holy Word very much as He began it in the book of Genesis.

- Genesis 1:1 contains all the essential elements for life on earth:
 - Time - In the beginning
 - Energy - God created
 - Space - The heavens
 - Matter - The earth

From these things, God was able to create all of the animate and inanimate creatures that inhabit earth including man and woman. Adam and Eve were given a paradise to live in, a beautiful garden. The tree of life was there and a river watered the garden. There was no sin in the garden. All was perfect; God was there. He walked and talked with His creation.

When sin entered the garden, everything changed. Man’s sin separated him from God (Isaiah 59:2). He was cast out of the garden into a very imperfect world of sorrow, pain, and despair. The primary theme through the remainder of God’s Word is God’s plan to bring mankind back to that perfect paradise, back into His presence, back to a place where *“there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”*

The final two chapters of Revelation describe such a place. The tree of life is there (22:2). The river of life is there (21:6, 22:1). God is there (22:3-5). Once again, God walks and talks with His creation “*And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever*” (22:3-5). “*Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God*” (21:3).

All has come full circle. There is no longer a need for: time, space, or matter. The earth has been burned up (2 Peter 3:10). In the day of the Lord (Revelation 19 & 20) when all creation is judged, the earth and all of its sorrow, pain, and sin will be completely destroyed. The only thing that continues to exist from Genesis 1:1 is God... His power, His energy, His glory, and His love. A paradise beyond human words or comprehension awaits those who believe God, trust Him, and obey Him. In Matthew chapter 13 Jesus described two men who had found hidden treasure and a rare pearl. Their attitude was to sacrifice everything else to obtain this great treasure. It truly was that great. What about you? What will you do with Jesus? Will you accept God’s invitation to enter into the paradise He has prepared for those who love Him? Do not be deceived, it takes more than simply believing in God and confessing Jesus. It takes obedience and a total commitment, but it is worth it. Nothing else can compare. As Dee Bowman said so eloquently “If you miss heaven, you have simply missed it all.”

By the grace of God, I hope to see you there one day.

Questions for Discussion

1. In chapter 21 verse 1, what might the new heaven and new earth represent symbolically? See Isaiah 65:17, Isaiah 66:22, and 2 Peter 3:10-13.
2. In chapter 21 there is a description of a city. Considering the consistent use of symbolism in Revelation, should we believe this is a literal city or symbolic of the new heaven and new earth, the city of God?
3. In the Old Testament, the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle was a cube (10X10X10). The Holy of Holies in the temple was a cube (20X20X20). The Holy City (where God dwells) described in Revelation 21:16 is also a cube. Do you see any significance in this (or is it simply coincidental)?

4. Who is the “*bride, the Lamb’s wife*” mentioned in 21:9? Re. Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-8

5. Whose names were written on the foundations of the holy city, Jerusalem?

6. Compare the beatitude given in 22:7 with the beatitude in 1:3. What is the message for us today?

7. Why is there no temple in the new Jerusalem (heaven)? (21:22)

8. Where else in scripture is the “tree of life” (22:2) mentioned? What is the significance if any?

9. What is different about the instructions given to John (Revelation 22:10) and the instructions given to Daniel (Daniel 8:26, 12:4, 12:9)? Why the difference?

10. If the righteous will serve Him forever and ever (22:3-5), how long will the unrighteous be tormented (Matthew 22:13, 25:41, 25:46)?

Making Application

I am convinced that the longer one lives the more one comes to realize the futility of life “under the sun.” With time, trials, and trouble the words of Solomon ring even more clearly in one’s ears “vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” If this is all there is, then woe are we but, thanks be to God, this is not all there is. At the conclusion of Revelation, God

describes a place too marvelous for comprehension. It is beautiful because, first of all, there is no sin there. No curse. Therefore, there is no darkness there; no night. Its beauty is beyond description. It is a place God has prepared for all of His creation. He wants all of us to enjoy it forever and ever. But we must choose to be there. Who wouldn't choose such a place?

Satan has been defeated and his fate sealed (Revelation 12:9; 20:2-3) but, for a little while, he still has power to deceive (Revelation 20:7-8). Multitudes today are being deceived by Satan's lies about humanism, materialism, evolution, etc. They are convinced that either there is no God or that, if there is a God, He will not require an account. Therefore, they follow the wisdom of the world (Satan) and do not accept God's gift of life with Him in paradise.

Do not be deceived. You must make a choice. Choose wisely.

Revelation

Lesson Thirteen

Summary and Application

“Unto Him that sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honor, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever”

Revelation 5:13

Lesson Goal:

To summarize the lessons we learned from our study of Revelation and find applications for our lives.

Text:

Revelation Chapters 1-22

Introduction and Commentary

What have we learned from the study of this wonderful book? We began in chapter one by seeing our Savior described by John as *“the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth, the Alpha and the Omega.”* He was there in the beginning and participated in the creation of all things. He will be present at the end when heaven and earth are permanently destroyed. He quite literally is the beginning and the end.

We listened intently as Jesus proclaimed partial judgments against seven churches located in Asia. Through the eyes of faith, we could see our own congregations reflected and described in these letters. *“He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* We were reminded that nothing is hidden from our Lord. *“He knows”* all things that we do collectively and individually and we will be judged accordingly.

Through the inspired writing of the Apostle John, we were allowed to view the most glorious place in existence: the throne room of Almighty God. We were given a glimpse of His glory and majesty; His beauty, and purity, and power. We saw those who serve Him day and night and their endless praise *“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.”* And we realized that truly, truly He is worthy.

Immediately after seeing God ruling on His throne, we were introduced to a Lamb. The Lamb of God that had been slain (sacrificed) but was now alive. Just as God provided a lamb for Abraham to sacrifice (Genesis 22:8-9), He now in the end has offered His only begotten Son as the Lamb without spot or blemish to be sacrificed for the sins of the entire world. We saw the Lamb take the scroll *“out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne”* and knew that salvation had come to mankind.

We wondered, along with John and all of heaven, what would happen when the seven seals that securely kept the scroll closed were opened. Both great and terrible things happened at the opening of the seals. Christ and His gospel to free man from sin went forth followed by conflict and persecution. Discrimination and scarcity followed the opening of the third seal and then widespread death on earth when the fourth seal was opened. We saw the martyrs cry out for justice and they were comforted and assured that justice would come. We saw severe but partial (not final) judgments come on earth after the sixth seal was opened. We anxiously waited for the seventh and final seal to be opened but its opening was delayed (God does not measure time as we measure time). During this interlude we saw God seal His people on earth who still served Him faithfully. He protected them and cared for them through their tribulation on earth.

At the opening of the seventh seal, trumpets sounded. The trumpets warned of the judgment to come. The first four trumpets warned of calamities ranging from hail and fire to volcanoes to wormwood, and darkness. We realized that these were symbolic of partial judgments against mankind and the earth and were warnings of greater judgments to follow. We were told that the sounding of the last three trumpets would pronounce three terrible woes on the inhabitants of the earth. *“And I looked, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!’”* The first woe (fifth trumpet) saw the opening of the bottomless pit and the release of the scorpion locusts with Satan as their king. As the sixth trumpet sounded, the second woe was pronounced against mankind in the form of three plagues which caused widespread death and destruction. Surprisingly, *“the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands...and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”* After numerous warnings and terrible judgements, man still ignored God and continued in sin.

We realized that all of this was leading up to the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet and the third woe. So we, with rapt attention, watched and listened to what happened before the last trumpet was sounded. We saw a mighty angel with a little book and John was told to take the book from the angel and eat it. As John ate the book it was sweet as honey in his mouth (something to be desired and enjoyed) but bitter in his stomach (the message in the book would not be pleasantly received). We then saw two witnesses who prophesied, were killed and resurrected. *“...the third woe is coming quickly.”* And that third woe was the submission of all of the kingdoms of the earth to the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. This was just as Daniel had prophesied (Daniel 2:44). Woe to the Roman Empire. It would be destroyed by a King whose soldiers had no horses or chariots and no physical armor or sword. Its sword was the Word of God.

The kingdoms of earth were destroyed but what about the spiritual forces of evil? This conflict and victory was revealed next. A radiant woman gave birth to a child and a fiery red dragon was waiting and ready to devour the child. This child *“was to rule all nations with a rod of iron”* (Psalm 2). The dragon, Satan (12:9), persecuted the woman but she and the child were protected and nourished by God. When Satan could not destroy the

woman, he turned his attention to “her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Satan would now turn his attention to persecuting and destroying God’s children, the Christians. This persecution started in the first century, continues today, and will continue until Christ returns. It is Satan’s final, futile act. Sadly, he continues to destroy the souls of many. “... *your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8).

We saw Satan recruit willing allies in the form of the Roman Empire and Roman Emperors. The Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Earth gladly joined in the persecution of Christians. Their acts of persecution were gruesome and horrible but the Lamb was greater than the beasts and the body of Christ grew stronger in spite of (or because of?) the great persecution.

We saw terrible judgments against the unrepentant masses who despised God and worshipped the beast. These judgments came in the form of “*seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God...*” The seven trumpets had warned of the judgments to come. When the bowls of God’s wrath were poured out on mankind, we knew the end was near. Instead of turning to God and finding relief, hope and salvation “*they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.*”

Before the last and final judgment, there was a judgment against Satan’s allies: Rome and the Roman Empire. As foretold in Daniel chapters 2 and 7, the mighty Roman Empire would fall and Christ’s kingdom would prevail. And so it was recorded for us in chapters 17, 18, and 19. No earthly kingdom could prevail against the armies of God. They never have and never will.

*“And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean
Followed Him on white horses.
Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword,
That with it He should strike the nations.
And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron.
He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness
And wrath of Almighty God.”*

19:14-15

The pagan empires of men were defeated, Satan was bound, and Christ reigns. All that remains is the final judgment and in chapter 20 we see a description of the final judgment. It begins with Satan (vs 10) and continues until all are judged “*small and great.*” Finally, Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. This is the second and final death for those not in Christ. Those faithful to the Lamb (their names found written in the Book of Life) have no fear of the second death. They will live forever in the paradise prepared by God (chapters 21 & 22).

Questions for Discussion

1. To whom was the Revelation written?
2. What are three rules for studying Revelation (mentioned in lesson one)?
3. What three things did Christ say to all of the churches (chapters 2 & 3)?
4. Who is the object of worship in chapter four? Why is He worthy?
5. Who/what is the Lamb in chapter five? What did the Lamb do that no one else was able to do?
6. What does the number 144,000 represent?
7. In chapter twelve, who were the Radiant Woman, the Dragon, and the Male Child?
8. In Revelation, the 7 letters instruct (chapters 2 & 3), the 7 seals reveal (chapters 5-8), and the 7 trumpets warn (chapters 8-11). What do the 7 bowls do (chapters 15 & 16)?

9. What great city reigned over the kings of the earth at the time Revelation was written (17:18)?

10. What four cities in the Old Testament were referred to as either a harlot or a mistress? Given the description of the harlot in Revelation 17, could Rome be a composite of these four cities (harlots)?

11. Three women were mentioned in Revelation. One was the radiant woman (12:1). The second was the harlot (chapters 17 & 18) whose judgment was described in 19:2. A third woman was introduced in 19:7-8. Who/what did these women represent?

12. Is the thousand years mentioned in chapter 20 literal or symbolic? If symbolic, what does it represent?

13. What are the two resurrections described in chapter 20.

14. Compare the beatitude given in 22:7 with the beatitude in 1:3. What is the message for us today?

15. Where else in scripture is the “tree of life” (22:2) mentioned?

Making Application

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen , being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools.”

Romans 1:20-22

Too much earthly wisdom blinds us to the obvious. Listen to God and be truly wise.

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:32

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More Bible lessons can be found at: www.northcountrylight.com

End Notes

References

¹ Homer Hailey, *Revelation An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 391.

² Carl McMurray, *From Beneath the Altar*, (Indianapolis, IN: Faith and Facts Press, 1993), p. 142.

³Albertus Piets, *The Lamb, The Woman, and the Dragon* (Chillicothe, Ohio: DeWard Publishing Company, Ltd, 2012).