

An Exposition of Revelation

By Harold Camping

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A free subscription to the quarterly *New Life Digest* magazine can be obtained from Family Radio upon request (see information for contacting Family Radio under “Background Information” at the end of this book). May God richly bless you as you read this important study of Revelation.

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Introduction

The Book of Revelation is difficult to understand and, as a result, it has indeed been widely misunderstood. More often than not, though, it's because the reader, or the expositor, has depended on his own understanding to interpret or rationalize the symbols used by God in this last book of the Bible. To avoid being similarly snared, we should follow the strict principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture – in other words, letting the Bible interpret itself.

As you read this serial, therefore, you will find many fresh insights into the Word of God, insights that are fully supported by Scripture. You will also be thrilled to discover that Revelation is not nearly as incomprehensible as you may have thought, and that every truth it conveys is in full harmony with the rest of the Bible.

Most importantly, you will almost surely develop a much deeper appreciation of the awesome glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and of His amazing mercy and grace, His holiness and justice.

Revelation is a book that has intrigued scholars down through the ages. It has the potential of bringing to us an enormous amount of truth. However, Revelation is not easy to understand because in this book God uses symbols extensively to reveal truth. To learn what God is telling us, we must realize that we are wholly dependent on the leading of the Holy Spirit and that the Bible is its own interpreter.

When we come to those passages that are especially difficult to understand, therefore, we need to go to the rest of the Bible for help, remembering that Revelation relates to the entire Bible and that the Bible is one cohesive whole. In short, guided by the Holy Spirit, we must compare spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:10-13). This is the principle I shall be following throughout this expository.

Revelation 1

*Lesson 1 for Revelation 1:1-7 ~ "The Revelation of Jesus Christ"*¹

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

In this opening verse, God tells us twice that there is a line of communication that He has worked out to bring us truth. The line begins with God, goes through the Lord Jesus Christ, and reaches down to His servants, those of us who have trusted in Christ and are ready to accept everything that He has for us.

Before we look at this line of communication, let us first see what it is revealing. The first phrase reads, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." It is telling us right at the outset that the message that is to be revealed is all about the Lord Jesus Christ.

In its development of the Gospel, the good news of God's salvation plan for mankind, the Bible begins with the fact that God has created us, that we are responsible for our standing before Him, and that we have to answer to Him for all our actions on this earth. God has also decreed that the wages of sin is death, and the death that God has in view is eternal damnation. That decree has put man in an absolutely hopeless situation because, since Adam's fall, all men have become sinners.

Wonderfully, God has provided a way of escape through the Lord Jesus Christ. He died for the sins of those who would believe on Him. This is the Good News. The whole Bible, therefore, focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unto Jesus. To whom has God given this revelation of Jesus Christ? The Lord Jesus Christ. But why has God given the revelation to Jesus, who Himself is the eternal God? Because Christ came to this earth as the suffering servant; He came completely obedient to God. In fact, the Bible says He even learned obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8).

Christ Himself made this remarkable statement recorded in John 12: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (v. 49). It underscores the absolute submission of Christ to the Father.

For those He had chosen to save, God worked out His whole salvation plan before time began so that, in principle, Christ was the Lamb that was slain from before the foundations of the earth. Yet, there had to come a point in time when Christ emptied Himself of His glory to become a human being. And it was in this God-man role that Jesus was given by God the revelation which He is to give to us.

Jesus, who is the Word, came to personify that Word when He became flesh (John 1:1,14). We thus read in Hebrews 1: "God, who at sundry times [different times] and in diverse manners [various manners] spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son..." (vv. 1,2). The Bible thus declares that the Gospel is what the triune God gave unto Jesus Christ to show unto us. This is the chain of communication for the proclamation of the Good News.

Things to come. Further in verse 1 we read, "things which must shortly come to pass." By itself, this statement suggests that Revelation has to do only with future things. But in verse 19, God tells us that the book also covers "the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter". Taken together, the two verses indicate that while Revelation deals with the past, present and future, its focal point is on things to come.

Remember, the Book of Revelation was written in the first century, some 1,900 years ago. It was going to discuss things which were then in front of the Apostle John. The book thus covers substantially the entire New Testament period, with special focus, however, on the end of time – that is, the final tribulation period, Judgment Day, and the new heaven and the new earth.

Verse 1 continues, "and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John." Who is this angel that God is going to use to communicate to John? The Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the Greek word translated "angel" here is the same word that is sometimes translated "messenger" in

the Bible. Both are equally correct. And in this passage, I think "messenger" is more appropriate.

Chief messenger. In Malachi 3:1, for example, the Lord Jesus Christ is called a messenger. The first half of that verse talks about John the Baptist who is to come as a messenger: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." But the second half clearly refers to Christ: "and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." Yes, Christ is the messenger who brings us the magnificent covenant of salvation.

That Jesus is indeed the one who is bringing a message to John can be more clearly seen from verses 10 and 11: "I [John] was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.'" Christ, of course, is Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.

We thus find that the second clause of Revelation 1:1 sets forth the same line of communication spoken of in the first. This whole verse emphasizes that the revelation of God moves from Him through the Lord to us, His servants.

Before we leave verse 1, I would like to comment briefly on two more words. First, the word "signified" in "He sent and signified it" indicates that the message was to be sent through signs, visions and parables. God is saying, in other words, that He will be teaching dramatic truth in parabolic language.

Secondly, the "John" to whom the message was given is evidently the Apostle John, since there is no other John in the Bible whom it might have reference to. John the Baptist had already been beheaded. The Apostle John was a very humble and modest person. When he wrote the Gospel of John, he never used his own name; he simply spoke of himself as the apostle that Jesus loved. Here, too, he did not specifically identify himself.

1:2. Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

John was uniquely qualified to bear record of the Word of God, which is the Lord Himself. The Apostle was present with the Lord during His three-and-a-half years of ministry on earth, so he was among the few who heard in person the gospel preached by Christ Himself. He was also present when Jesus was tried, crucified, and buried. And after Jesus had risen, he was present when the Lord ascended back into heaven.

Verse 2 continues, "...and of the testimony of Jesus Christ." Remember in verse 1 we read that God gave unto Christ the things which must shortly come to pass, and Christ in turn gave these to His servants? So the Apostle John not only bears record of Christ and the things that he has learned directly from the Lord, he is also bearing record of those things that Christ is about to declare to him in the Book of Revelation, those things which Christ will be showing him through visions.

1:3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

The first principle to be derived from this verse is that in order to be blessed we must read the Word. We can read it ourselves, or it can be

¹ *New Life Digest (NLD)*, Fourth Quarter 1994. [Original Series – Revelation 1:1-4 "Even So, Come, Lord Jesus (Part I)", *NLD*, August 1987; Revelation 1:5-8 "Even So, Come, Lord Jesus (Part II)", *NLD*, September 1987.]

read to us by others. There is no limit to how much time we can spend on reading the Word, or how much blessing we can derive therefrom.

Secondly, we must hear the Word. Why is it that some people can read or hear the Word and do not become saved? Because they are not hearing the Word in a spiritual sense; they hear only in a physical sense. Unless God has opened their spiritual ears, the Gospel message just doesn't register in their consciousness to evoke a response. To be blessed, they need to hear the Word in their heart.

Finally, we must keep the Word. Many people can answer difficult doctrinal questions and know all the details of the historical events recorded in the Bible. Yet, in their personal lives, they are not obedient to the Word of God. These people are not blessed because blessing comes only when we have become saved. And we have become saved only when Christ has softened our heart so that there is an earnest desire to be obedient to the Word of God.

Verse 3 ends with: "for the time is at hand." When John the Baptist began to preach, he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." Later, Jesus started His earthly ministry by proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. What did they mean by those statements?

Well, the kingdom of God is made up of all believers. Because Christ had come to head up His kingdom, the time had also come for that kingdom to expand with people from all over the world becoming saved. So, God is emphasizing that Today is the time for salvation, the time to enter that kingdom. If we are not saved now, we will not be saved in eternity.

Incidentally, the word "prophecy" in this verse, refers to all the revelation of God, the whole Word of God. Why? Because we are told to keep the things written therein.

1:4. John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.

This verse begins by telling us to whom the Book of Revelation was addressed. Every statement in the Bible has an immediate person or group of people to whom it is directed. In the New Testament, it might be a letter to a church or an individual. In the Old Testament, it might be a discourse to ancient Israel or such nations as Egypt or Babylon, or it might be a statement to Abraham or Moses. Likewise, the Book of Revelation was written – in the first instance – to the seven churches that then existed in Asia.

We must remember, however, that while God chose to write the Bible in this fashion, the message nevertheless is to every human being. That's why blessed are those who read, hear and keep God's Word.

Why was this particular message addressed to these seven churches? I believe it's because they represent the whole New Testament Church. The number seven in the Bible, if it has any spiritual significance, represents perfection. And the perfection of God's plan for the churches is that there would be people coming into the body of Christ all through time – particularly after Pentecost. And Asia, being outside of Israel, represents the "utmost parts" of the earth.

Grace. In the next phrase, we see what God desires for those who are going to be included in His church: "Grace be unto you, and peace".

Simply stated, grace means unmerited favor. But the word "grace" really embodies the whole message of salvation; it represents God's entire salvation program. To paint the picture in the proper setting, we have to realize that the human race was created to love, obey and glorify God. Made in the image of God, man was the zenith of God's beautiful creation at the

beginning of time. Yet mankind rebelled against God and went their own way.

God's first command to man was, "But of the tree of knowledge, of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The death that God had in view was eternal damnation. Since Adam's fall, therefore, God's justice demands that the rebellious human race should be swept into eternal damnation.

But God then offers man salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. But man is so perverse that in spite of the Gospel, nobody seeks after God (Rom. 3:11). Even when God comes to us with the possibility of reconciliation, not one of us wants to be right with Him (v. 10). Still, God in His grace decided to save some of these sinners. But to save them and still keep His perfect justice, it was necessary for God to take on a human nature and bear the punishment for the sins of those He has come to save, so that they will never be threatened with eternal damnation.

More than that, He opens our spiritual eyes and ears so that we see our sins and begin to cry out to God for mercy; He gives us a new heart and a resurrected soul so that there is an intense desire to live for Him, and He promises that we will someday receive a resurrected spiritual body so that we will be completely without sin.

Yes, grace encompasses all of that and a lot more.

Peace. The word "peace" speaks of the same salvation plan, but from a different vantage point. Whereas grace paints the whole picture of our rebellion and our undeserving condition, peace presents us (before we were saved) as those who are at war with God, those who are slaves of Satan. In His salvation plan, God, the Prince of Peace, comes with the peace treaty so that we might be at peace with God. Grace and peace, then, is what God desires for all the churches.

Where does this grace and peace come from? "From him which is, and which was, and which is to come." This interesting set of words is speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ. We know this because verse 8 identifies the person with that description as the Alpha and Omega. It reads, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."

Then in verses 11-13, the Alpha and Omega is identified as the Lord Jesus Christ. In that passage, John hears a voice saying, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last", and when he turns to see who is speaking, he sees "in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man". Christ, of course, is the Son of man.

But why is Christ called "which is, and which was, and which is to come"? The term "which was" reminds us of John 1:1 where we read, "and the Word was God." It declares that Jesus is from eternity past. The term "which is" means that He is the ever present one. And "which is to come" tells us that He will come on the clouds of glory one day to wrap up the whole salvation program. He is from eternity past, He is present with us, and He is to come back for us.

In verse 18, we find another reason why God uses this particular language for Jesus: "I am he that liveth [which is], and was dead [which was]; and, behold, I am alive for evermore [which is to come]." The parallelism here is not precisely exact; but the fact that Christ died on the cross can at least be a minor implication of this verse.

Seven Spirits. The closing phrase of verse 4 reads: "and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne." Who are these seven Spirits? And what throne is this?

We read in Revelation 5:6, "I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in

the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." The seven spirits of God are that which God sent forth into all the earth. Relating to the sending forth of the Gospel into all the world, they typify God the Holy Spirit in His divine perfection.

What about the throne? In Ephesians 1 verse 19, we read: "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body."

You see, the Lord is seated on the throne of His glory. He reigns because He has overcome death. He has endured hell for our sins and He has been raised from the dead. He is reigning over everything, not only in this present age during which God is saving His elect and building His church, but also in the eternity that is to come.

1:5a. And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

Why are we told again that grace and peace are from Jesus Christ, since verse 4 has already said so? In the last verse, Jesus was presented as the God who is from everlasting to everlasting. Here, He is presented as our Savior.

The name "Jesus" means Savior. Matthew 1:21: "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." And the name "Christ" is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word "Messiah". It stands for the one who was to come as the Anointed One, the king who would rule.

The next few phrases call attention to the Lord's three-fold office – as prophet, priest and king:

The Prophet. To start with, Jesus is described as "the faithful witness". A witness is one who can testify from personal knowledge to something that has taken place. Because Jesus came to earth in visible form and was crucified, buried and resurrected in a visible way, He Himself has become the perfect testimony that the promised salvation program from God is true and trustworthy.

If you ever wonder whether the Bible is really the Word of God, you should find most reassuring the fact that the Lord came to earth as a human less than 2,000 years ago, exactly as the Scriptures had prophesied. That historical event confirms that the Bible is absolutely trustworthy. Thus, Jesus is the faithful witness of the grace of God.

The Priest. As "the first begotten of the dead", the Lord is seen here in His role as the priest. We know from Hebrews 4 that Christ is the "great high priest" who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin". And from Hebrews 7 we learn that He is the perfect priest because "He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood" and "He ever liveth to make intercession" for God's people.

You see, the priests of the Old Testament made animal sacrifices to atone for man's sin. But Christ came to offer up Himself as the Lamb of God, allowing Himself to be crucified on the Cross. And because He rose again afterwards, He is the first begotten of the dead.

A lot of people stumble on this matter of Jesus being the first begotten, or the firstborn, because these terms seem to imply that He has a beginning. To better understand these terms, let's look at Colossians 1:15-18: "[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every

creature. For by him were all things created...and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

This emphasizes that Christ is not a created being in any sense; He is before all things. Yes, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but His conception in the womb of Mary merely marks the beginning of His incarnation as a human. And because all things were created by Him and for Him, God considers Him the firstborn of every creature; the One entitled to inherit all things from God.

Moreover, just as He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), He was, in principle, resurrected from the dead before time began. And thus, He is the first begotten of the dead. And His death and resurrection qualified Him to be the head of the church.

The King. Verse 5 continues, "and the prince of the kings of the earth." Immediately, we think of Christ being the King of kings, the Lord of lords. He is the prince of Kings because He raises up kings and puts down kings.

But I think there is another, more important meaning to that phrase. Who are the kings of this earth that God is particularly interested in? The people who have been saved. A passage that describes believers as kings is verse 15 of Isaiah 52, a chapter that talks about the sending forth of the Gospel into the world. It reads, "So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider."

To "sprinkle many nations" means to wash away the sins of people from many nations; and "the kings shall shut their mouths at him" indicates that those who have become saved by that cleansing would no longer be in rebellion against Him. We know the kings here refer to believers because the second half of that verse is quoted in Romans 15:21, where the Apostle Paul is speaking about his being called to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

So, we are "kings of the earth" from the moment we are saved, and Christ is our prince, our ruler. We are not political kings, of course. We rule in the sense that we have authority over Satan. We can present the Gospel to the unsaved, who are in bondage to Satan, and set free those whom God plans to save. We can also rule over our own body so that we do not go deeper and deeper into sin.

1:5b,6. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

This passage teaches that all praise and glory go to Him and His Father, who loved us while we were sinners and, in His love, washed away our sins with His own shed blood. Indeed, had Christ not done that, we would surely spend eternity in hell since there was none other that could save us.

We know that from Isaiah 63:4,5, "For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me."

Priests. Verse 6 then tells us that we have been made "kings and priests" unto God and His Father. We have learnt earlier of our having been made kings, now God says we are priests, too. Among the things priests in the Old Testament did was to make intercession for the Israelites, to ask for God's forgiveness and blessing for those who came before Him with their sins. While Christ is the Great High Priest, we believers are priests also because we intercede before God on behalf of those who are

unsaved. We pray for them and witness to them. This is a dominant role that God gives to every believer.

Remember, we are saved not for our own sake, but for the glory of God. The Bible makes this clear in Ezekiel 36:32, "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel." Likewise, we read in Ephesians 1:5,6: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, to the praise of the glory of his grace."

We have been made kings and priests strictly to glorify God, to serve God, to proclaim the Gospel, to intercede for the unsaved, to help build the church and to complete the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mystery. In verse 6 we see the interesting phrase "God and his Father". The Lord Jesus, of course, addresses God the Father as Father. But here it speaks of God and His Father; this then is one of many verses in the Bible clearly indicating that Jesus is God. Some people reading this conclude that there are two Gods – God the Father and God the Son. Others, including the Holy Spirit, say there are three Gods. But the Bible teaches that while there are three persons, there is only one God.

How can there be three persons in the Godhead and yet there is just one God? This is a mystery our finite minds can never understand. So, we simply accept it by faith, knowing that the Bible is true and trustworthy. One thing we know from this verse is that Jesus Christ is eternal God.

Verse 6 ends, "to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." The mystery stays with us. Note that the pronoun him is singular although it refers to "God and His Father". There are two persons mentioned in this verse, yet there is just one God. Be that as it may, to Him indeed be all glory and dominion. The phrase "for ever and ever" emphasizes that there is an eternity, and the word "amen" means "So be it; this is the absolute truth."

1:7. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

Note the interesting way God develops this. In verse 5, He talks about our salvation through Christ; in verse 6, our evangelizing the world to God's glory; and here in verse 7, His coming with the clouds. Meaning: Once God has completed His salvation program through Christ, the Lord Jesus will return to judge the world.

We see this very clearly in Revelation 14:14,15: "And I [John] looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, 'Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.'"

Here, we see Jesus coming with the clouds of glory to harvest the earth. What will He do with the harvest? Verse 19: "And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God." Casting into the great winepress of God's wrath is a figure of speech to indicate eternal damnation on Judgment Day. Woe unto the unsaved when He comes.

The phrase "every eye shall see him" means that no one will escape the coming of the Lord. No matter where a person is, he will see Christ returning in the clouds of glory. Again, it's impossible for our finite minds to comprehend this, but we know that with God, all things are possible.

But what about the dead? Since the earth began, billions of people have already died and are in their graves. Will they see Him, too? Yes,

they will. We read in John 5:28,29: "For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

The saved. As verse 7 continues, God divides the people of the earth into two groups: the saved and the unsaved. The first group, described as "they... which pierced him" comprises all believers. Now, it's true that the Pharisees and the high priests were the ones who plotted His death, and the Roman soldiers were the ones who nailed Him to the cross and pierced His side. But this verse is talking about those who have been saved.

Why do I say that? We read in Zechariah 13:1, "In that day [describing all that which has been said in the preceding chapter], there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

The only day when a fountain was opened to cleanse us from sin was when Christ went to the cross. The "fountain" was the fountain of His blood. Thus, both "the house of David" and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem", whose sin and uncleanness are to be washed by that fountain, symbolize believers. From this, we know for certain that what has been said in chapter 12 is a prophecy of the wonderful salvation that will come.

With that in mind, let's back up to chapter 12 verse 10, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced." Again, the Spirit of grace has been poured out only upon those who have become saved. In this verse then, God clearly identifies us believers as the ones who pierced Christ. It is because of the sins of believers only that He went to the cross.

There are some who teach that Christ died for everyone. That cannot be. If Jesus paid for the sins of everybody so that even unbelievers have been washed of their sins, why then must they still stand for judgment and be plunged into hell? That would make a mockery of God's justice. No, Christ was pierced on our behalf only. And when Christ comes on the last day, we who pierced Him will look upon Him.

The unsaved. "And all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Here, God is saying that all the other peoples of the earth, those who remain unsaved, will wail because of Him. We read a similar statement in Matthew 24:30, which also speaks about the second coming of Christ: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

The reason why Christ's return will make the unsaved wail and mourn is explained in Revelation 6. Verses 12-14 read: "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." This describes that the universe is falling apart, it is the end of time.

Now, notice verses 15-17: "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?'"

Judgment Day. Here is the culmination for the unsaved. When Christ returns, it will be the day

of God's wrath. He comes in judgment. Those who are unsaved will stand guilty before Him. At that time, no one will be able to face Him and stand under His wrath. The peoples of the earth will wail, they will mourn, they will cry.

The last words of verse 7, "Even so, amen" mean this is indeed so. It is a way of underscoring the statement that Judgment Day is coming.

Lesson 2 for Revelation 1:8-20 ~ "Vision of Christ in Heaven"

1:8. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending," saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

In this verse, Christ is speaking to us directly, identifying Himself as "Alpha and Omega" and explaining that the name means "the beginning and the ending". As alpha is the beginning of the Greek alphabet and omega is the last letter of that alphabet, Christ is using this phrase to underscore that He is preeminence in everything. We have already discussed the meaning of the statement "which is, and which was, and which is to come" in verse 4.

Almighty. The last word in this verse, "Almighty", requires some explanation. This name for God is used nearly fifty times in the Old Testament. For example, we read in Exodus 6:3, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them." There, God told Moses that He had made Himself known to the early patriarchs as God Almighty, but not as Jehovah.

By way of contrast, in the entire New Testament, there is only one verse outside of the Book of Revelation where the word Almighty is found in reference to God. That's II Corinthians 6:18, which says, "And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." It is a quotation from II Samuel 7 in the Old Testament.

Why this difference between the two Testaments? You see, "God Almighty" is a name emphasizing the fact that He is the creator of the universe, the one who is infinite in His might, while "Jehovah" is the name by which God declares to us that He is the Savior. Thus, in the Exodus 6 example above, He is telling the nation of Israel through Moses that they are now about to experience His salvation as JEHOVAH God.

The New Testament, of course, focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ mainly as our Savior. Hence, God uses the names "Jesus" and "Christ" repeatedly to spotlight the saving work, or the JEHOVAH work, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1:9. I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Here, the conversation moves from Jesus back to John. In Hebrew, the word "John" means "favored by Jehovah". In that sense, the Apostle John is a picture of every one of us who has become a child of God; we have received the grace of God. This truth is reiterated by the phrase "who also am your brother". Spiritually we, who have become saved, are brothers to one another regardless of the color of our skin or the denomination we belong to.

John goes on to say that we are "companion in tribulation". That's something we don't like to hear. No one wants to go through trials and

tribulation. But we will experience tribulation if we, like the apostle John, really serve as faithful stewards of the gospel. The world, which doesn't want to hear the Word of God, will scorn us, laugh at us, or even persecute us. Satan will throw "fiery darts" at us. Hence, many Christians have been martyred; others have been much persecuted.

We are companions in tribulation also because it grieves our hearts to know that so many in this world are destined to spend eternity in hell. We especially mourn for those loved ones who remain unsaved.

Fellow citizens. We are also companions "in the kingdom...of Jesus Christ". We read in John 3:3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and verse 5, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." To be born again, or to be born of water and the spirit, means that we have to be born of God.

How does one become born of God? John 1:12,13, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." So, we become born again when we receive the grace of God and acknowledge Christ as our Lord and Savior. Then, we enter the kingdom of God and become companions in the kingdom with other believers.

Patience of Jesus Christ. But why are we companions in the "patience of Jesus Christ"? The Greek word for "patience" literally means "to stay under". We, along with other believers, are to stay under, or to endure, whatever God has for us. It would be ideal if, as soon as we are saved, God calls us home to heaven. But God has work for us to do on earth, and we are to endure and be patient as we carry out our tasks.

More importantly, we are also to participate in the endurance of Jesus Christ. In Colossians 1:24, Paul writes, "[I] now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." The apostle is saying in effect that when Christ came to bring the Gospel, He suffered and endured. Paul, considering it a privilege to complete Christ's sufferings, rejoices that he has been assigned the task of continuing that work. That should be our attitude as well.

God is not asking us to endure the sufferings on our own, though. To sustain us, He has promised not to test us beyond what we are able to bear, but will provide a way of escape (I Cor. 10:13). And He tells us not to be anxious about anything. When we make our requests known to Him by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, His peace will keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6,7). Remembering such promises when we go through trials and tribulations indeed brings us much comfort.

John's suffering. As this verse continues, John talks about his own suffering. He has been exiled on the isle of Patmos, from which there was no possibility of escape. An aged man at this point, he no doubt suffered greatly. But John endured, declaring that he did so "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ".

There are two meanings to this phrase: (1) the apostle is being punished for having been faithful in presenting the Word of God and in testifying about the Lord Jesus Christ; and (2) God has put him there because He will use him as the human instrument to finish the Bible. He is to receive visions and write them down in what we call the Book of Revelation.

We can find much blessing in this information. It underscores the fact that everything that happens in our life is under the control of God. When John was exiled, his friends most likely felt sorry for him. They probably said, "How

terrible it is that our aged brother has to go through the rigor of being sent to a concentration camp." But in reality, God had a larger purpose for the apostle, giving him the privilege of recording the divine messages that close off the Holy Canon.

As a child of God, therefore, we can know that all things do work out together for good for those who are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). God has a purpose for every trial in our life and we simply wait patiently upon the Lord, knowing that God is sovereign, and wondering what blessings will come from it.

1:10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

Today we call Sunday the Lord's Day because Christ rose on Sunday and the Holy Spirit was poured out on Sunday. In the beginning, in fact, God said "Let there be light" on the first day of the week to anticipate His salvation program. So, it's altogether fitting and proper that we worship on the first day of the week and call it the Lord's Day.

The Bible doesn't call Sunday the Lord's Day, though; it simply calls it the first day of the week. So, this verse is not saying that John received this revelation of Christ on a Sunday. Actually, the statement should read this way: I was in the Spirit *in* the Lord's Day, or I was in the Spirit *in* the day of the Lord. The original Greek word means "in" not "on".

From I Thessalonians 5:2, Philippians 1:6, II Thessalonians 2:2 and II Peter 3:12, we can readily see that whenever God uses such terms as "the day of the Lord", "the day of Christ", or "the day of God", He invariably refers to Judgment Day, when Christ returns on the clouds of glory and reveals Himself as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Apostle John is thus telling us that he, having been deeply moved by the Holy Spirit, is writing that which relates primarily to Judgment Day. Indeed, the Book of Revelation, while it does refer to the beginning of time, the Cross and other developments, mainly focuses on events leading to, and culminating on, the day when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back to gather the elect and to judge the world.

The trumpet. John tells us that he heard "behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet". This verse, coupled with the next, where Jesus identifies Himself as the speaker, reveals that the trumpet is none other than the voice of God Himself. So, when the Bible talks about the sound of a trumpet, we know that it has the Lord Himself in view. With that in mind, let's look at a few familiar verses:

Matthew 24:31: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect." Since "the sound of the trumpet" is God's voice, this verse is thus talking about the same event as John 5:28,29: "For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth."

I Thessalonians 4:16: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God." As the English words "angel" and "messenger" come from the same Greek word, the proper translation here would be "the arch-messenger". The word "arch" means chief, and the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, is the Chief Messenger of God. Thus, His voice is identified with the trump or trumpet of God: I Corinthians 15:52: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

You see, the sound of a trumpet is not a literal trumpet blowing; it is the voice of God "shouting" on Judgment Day. So, when the Bible talks about the trumpet sounding, it is talking about the Lord calling the dead to rise on the last day so as to bring judgment on the unsaved and

² *New Life Digest*, First Quarter 1995. [Original Series – Revelation 1:9-13 "Even So, Come, Lord Jesus (Part III)", *NLD*, October 1987; Revelation 1:14-20 "Even So, Come, Lord Jesus (Part IV)", *NLD*, November 1987.]

complete the salvation of all those who shall have become saved.

The apostle John says that the voice of God is behind him. At this point, he is a picture of an unsaved person. When we are unsaved, we do not look at the Lord Jesus, but away from Him. We try to get as far away from Him as possible. But when God calls us, we turn from our sins and turn to see the Lord Jesus Christ. (We'll read in verse 12 that John turns and sees Him.)

1:11. Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

We've already seen that "Alpha and Omega" and "the first and the last" both underscore that God is preeminent in all things. He is before all things and goes on to everlasting. And now, this infinite God commands John to write what he sees in a book. What book is John to write in? The only book that God has been writing for over 1,500 years – the Bible. And John is going to be its very last contributor.

Did you ever stop and think how amazing it is that God, the Creator and Sustainer of this intricate and complex universe, would bother to record in black and white His will for us? The word "Bible" is not pretentious in itself; it simply means book. But it is a book that has no peer. It is not written by human authors. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [Holy Spirit]" (II Peter 1:21). It is a book that brings us truth if we read it with a view to being obedient to what we find there.

But instead of trusting what it says, man has been misusing, mistreating, misquoting, misinterpreting and mistranslating the Holy Bible. So rebellious against God is man that no matter how plain the Bible is, he concludes that what God declares cannot be.

Thank God that He has graciously saved us and enabled us to know that the Bible is the Word of God, the only source of truth. May we always treat it with reverence.

Seven churches. The apostle John is to send the written word to seven named churches. Those churches are all located in Asia Minor, an area that today is Turkey. Outside of national Israel, Asia Minor was then on the very forefront of the world itself. The letter is not being written to the church in Jerusalem because when John received the Revelation, Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the Roman armies.

Why seven churches? Seven is the number the Bible generally uses to represent perfection. God used it to set the number of days in a week. And we saw in Revelation 1:4 that the Holy Spirit was called the seven Spirits. These seven churches are a picture of the whole New Testament church as it exists throughout time. So, the admonitions given in this book are for all of us.

Incidentally, the seven specific churches that are spoken of no longer exist. All of the dire warnings that we'll read in Revelation 2 and 3 came to pass. At that time, these were churches from which the Gospel was going forth. But because of their disobedience, God has since removed them all.

1:12. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks.

The candlesticks here are the seven churches represented in heaven (v. 20). This figure of a candlestick comes from the Old Testament. In Exodus 25, where God is talking about the tabernacle, we read, "And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made" (v. 31); "And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the

lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it" (v. 37).

Then we read in chapter 27, "And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always" (v. 20).

Light of the World. The candlestick that was to burn always represented the church. Ultimately, Christ is the light of the world, the light of salvation. But being the body of Christ, the church, as it brings the Gospel, is also the light that will never go out.

The same allegory is found in Zechariah 4:2,3: "What seest thou?" And I said, 'I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof. And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.'

The number two in the Bible frequently signifies the church (God sent the first missionaries out two by two). And in Romans 11, God typifies the church by an olive tree into which we are grafted. Here we have two olive trees furnishing the oil for the lamps. It provides the light for the candles. Of course, that oil ultimately is the Holy Spirit Himself, who works through the church.

This figure of the olive trees and the candlesticks, as well as the number two, is picked up in Revelation 11, where it talks about the two witnesses of God. Verse 4 there says, "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." God is saying that these two witnesses represent the church as it brings the Gospel to the world.

1:13. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

We see here the intimate relationship existing between Christ and His church. He walks amidst the seven candlesticks. So if the church that you belong to is reasonably true to the Word of God, Christ walks in your presence.

The verse says "like unto the Son of man" and not the "Son of God" because Jesus is eternal God who had to become the Son of man in order to be our Savior and the head of the church.

Garment. We are told here that God is clothed with a garment. Psalm 104 tells us something about what that garment is: "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment..." (vv. 1,2).

The Lord Jesus is clothed with honor and majesty. Because He has become our Savior, He is worthy of all honor and respect and adulation. Jesus is also the light of the world. He is the very essence of truth, that which can bring us to salvation. We believers are light-bearers, but the light that we bring is the very light that is God Himself.

The Son of man is clothed down to the foot. It means that there is no naked spot on God. The Bible uses the state of nakedness as a picture of sins being exposed before God. After Adam and Eve had rebelled against God, they suddenly discovered that they were physically naked and were ashamed. Though they tried to cover themselves with a few fig leaves, they couldn't stand before God; they had to hide themselves. Their physical nakedness is a picture of their spiritual nakedness.

Similarly, when the Lord Jesus was on the cross, He was naked. It was a dramatic picture of His standing spiritually naked before God, laden with all of our sins. But now at Judgment Day, Christ is clothed with a garment down to His foot. Having resurrected and ascended back to heaven, He is now clothed with honor and majesty.

Girdle. As we go on in verse 13, we read that He was "girt about the paps with a golden girdle." It signifies that we derive spiritual nourishment from God. The Bible sometimes speaks about the Gospel as milk. Milk comes from "paps", which is an old English word for nipples.

This can be seen in Luke 23:29, where Jesus said to the women that were running after Him: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.'"

What does the golden girdle represent? First, we read in Isaiah 11:5, "And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins." Jesus is infinitely righteous. He is the one who answered all of the demands of the law on our behalf. And He is supremely faithful. Because of His faithfulness, we are saved.

Secondly, in Exodus 28, God describes the clothing the priest was to wear. Verse 8 reads, "And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen."

You see, the golden girdle is a part of a garment that was worn by the high priest. So, Christ's being girt about with a golden girdle is a picture of His being our eternal High Priest.

1:14. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire.

In the Bible, "white" and "white as snow" signify that which is absolutely pure. The snow white head and hairs here, therefore, picture the holiness of Christ. Wool comes from a sheep, and "white like wool" directs our attention to the fact that Christ, as our sin bearer, is the Lamb that was slain.

The phrase "white as snow" also appears in Isaiah 1:18, which reads, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." By His grace, believers are purified by the perfect cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

So far, all the phrases in this verse have focused on Jesus being the Savior. But now, we see a change. We read in the next phrase, "and his eyes were as a flame of fire." Fire in the Bible has to do with Judgment Day; it is a picture of eternal damnation. Describing His eyes as a flame of fire, this verse means that on Judgment Day God sees everything of those being judged – every evil deed, every evil word and every evil thought. When the unsaved stand before the Judgment throne, nothing in their lives will escape the Lord.

1:15. His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

First, this verse emphasizes that Christ Himself has endured the wrath of God for our sins; He has been the burnt offering. His feet have been burned in a furnace, the furnace of God's wrath.

But this verse also states that Christ will return as the Judge. Those very same feet, now shining like fine brass, will stand upon this earth with the unsaved under them. Unbelievers will all suffer the same punishment as Jesus suffered on behalf of the believers. God's justice must be satisfied.

The phrase "his voice as the sound of many waters" is a bit difficult to understand. In this verse, "many waters" is used to describe the voice of the Lord, but in Revelation 17, it seems to represent quite the opposite. Verse 1 of Revelation 17 talks about "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters" and then verse 15 explains, "The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." In other words, the waters represent all the

unsaved people of the world. They are sat upon, or ruled by, the great harlot, who is Satan himself.

But how can the voice of God be like the sound of all the unsaved? To get a better understanding, we need to look at other Scriptures. In Ezekiel chapter 43, a chapter that prophesied Christ's coming, we see the phrase "many waters" in verse 2: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory." Here again, the phrase "many waters" is related to the voice of God.

The clue. The seeming contradiction is resolved by Psalm 18, where we read, "He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me" (vv. 16,17). In this context, the term "many waters" is clearly identified with hell and damnation. The Psalmist was saved from it. Like the flood of Noah's day, many waters represents God's judgment.

When the Bible says that Christ's voice is like the sound of many waters in Revelation 1:15 and Ezekiel 43:2, therefore, it means that His voice is coming with judgment to condemn people to hell. And Revelation 17 is stressing the fact that the unsaved upon whom the great harlot sits – the unbelievers over whom Satan rules – are in many waters because they are subject to eternal damnation.

We thus begin to see the two-fold purpose of Christ's coming on the last day: as the Savior, He will complete the salvation of the saved; and as the Judge, He will condemn the unsaved to hell. This matches exactly what we read in John 5:28,29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

1:16. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Verse 20 of Revelation 1 tells us, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." Does this mean that every church has a particular angel like Gabriel that is identified with it? Is God holding that angel in His right hand as He comes on the last day?

No, that does not identify with anything else in the Bible at all. But remember we've learned earlier that the Greek word for "angel" can also be translated "messenger"? The latter is more appropriate for this verse. You see, Christ has set up the church to be God's messenger that brings the Gospel into the world. That is why it speaks here of each church as being a messenger.

Right hand. Next, we wonder why are the seven stars, the seven messengers of the church, in God's right hand. "Right hand" in the Bible signifies the will of God. A church or a congregation is in the will of God as it serves as His messenger by His authority.

Remember Ephesians states that after Christ was raised from the dead, He sat down at the right hand of God (1:20)? And that we believers have been raised with Christ and are seated in the heavenlies with Him (2:6)? So, we are also at the right hand of God. We reign and rule with Christ under the will of God.

Here in verse 16, therefore, God is saying that when Christ returns, all those who have been in churches that have been faithful to Him will rule and judge with Him. This is in line with 1 Thessalonians 4, which says that Christ will come back with believers. It also harmonizes with 1 Corinthians 6, which states that we will judge angels and men.

You see, although the physical bodies of believers that have died are in the tombs, their spirits have gone to be with Christ. They will come back with Him on the clouds of glory on the last day. Hence, when Jesus returns, He has in His right hand seven stars.

Two-edged sword. Then the next phrase says, "out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." A sharp sword in the first place signifies God's judgment. We read in Revelation 19:15, "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." To get a picture of this two-edged sword, though, we have to go to Hebrews 4:12, which reads, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

There, God equates the Word of God with a sharp, two-edged sword. This is why Christ is portrayed as having a sword coming out of His mouth. The Word of God comes out of the mouth of Jesus, and penetrates into the very essence of our being. That the sword has two edges emphasizes that it cuts both ways. It cuts to salvation, but it also cuts to damnation.

The sun. We also read that "his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." The Bible frequently uses the sun to picture the holiness and glory of God. It is a picture that we can understand because the sun is very much a part of our lives. The sunlight dominates our whole universe.

In verse 2 of Malachi 4 we read, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." The sun brings healing, it is a benevolent friend when the sunlight is just right. It causes plants to grow and the earth to be warmed. So, God is picturing the Lord here as the one from whom we believers are to receive blessings.

But for the unsaved, He will come as the sun in all of its strength to scorch and to burn. As they stand to face Christ shining as the scorching sun, they will be found guilty and plunged into hell.

1:17. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last.

What does this mean? Any time we stand in the holy presence of God, we stand condemned. Hence, John's falling at His feet as dead is a picture of the whole humankind under the wrath of God. Unless saved, we are subject to eternal damnation.

But John is not left there. "And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last." Here, we have the wonder of salvation painted for us. If we are saved, we have nothing to fear.

1:18. I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

The fact that He who was dead and is alive for evermore means that the Lord Jesus Christ has successfully paid the penalty for our sins. You see, Jesus' resurrection on the first Easter morning was a stupendous evidence that Christ had been victorious. He had endured everything that God poured out on Him and His resurrection means that He had fully satisfied the demands of the law.

Notice it says, "Behold, I am alive for evermore." What joyous words are those! The sting of death has been removed, the victory of the grave is all gone. God is effectively saying because I am alive for evermore, you too shall be alive forever.

This particular dramatic statement is concluded in the middle of verse 18 with the word "Amen", meaning truly, verily, it is so, this is truth, you can depend on it. God assures us that He is absolutely trustworthy.

The keys. Then, in the closing phrase of verse 18, we read, "and have the keys of hell and of death." Before we were saved, we were consigned to go to hell. But Christ has the keys of hell and death. We who have been saved are no longer subject to eternal damnation because Christ opens the door for us to escape that punishment. We are liberated from the second death. In Matthew 16, Jesus says, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail." He has the authority and the power to open those gates of hell.

Christ also has the keys to the first, physical death. We're going to die physically, but that's not the end for those of us who have been saved. We will be resurrected in a glorified spiritual body. All the vestiges of our former life will be gone. We will have a perfect body in which we will live eternally with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But Christ has the key to lock up Satan as well. We read in Revelation 20 that "an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years." This angel is the messenger who is Christ Himself and the bottomless pit is hell.

1:19. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

Here we have a grand statement of the things we are going to read about in the Book of Revelation. Notice the parallelism that exists in this statement to that of verse 8. There Jesus describes Himself this way: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." By the parallelism, God is identifying the Gospel with Himself. Christ is from the past, He is the ever-present one, and He is forever in the future. And so the Gospel, also, is in the past, it is in the present and it is in the future.

What has John seen? He has seen the grace of God in his own life. He has seen the action of the Gospel in his day as he has lived with the Lord Jesus Christ. John has seen the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies in the person of the Lord Jesus. We can therefore expect the Book of Revelation to make reference to the Gospel as it has worked out in the course of the history of mankind. We are going to find references to Christ's coming as the Messiah.

New universe. But it also says, write "the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." Remember, the context in which the Apostle John is standing is Judgment Day, as if that were in the present. So we are going to see lots of statements in Revelation that deal with Judgment Day and the events that immediately surround it.

Of course, what comes after Judgment Day are the destruction of this universe by fire and the creation of the new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells. Christ will dwell in this new universe forever with the believers. That is the future which the Lord is telling John to write down.

As we go deeper in the Book of Revelation, therefore, we can expect to see God's whole plan of salvation. We are going to be reminded afresh of what God has done in the past, the antecedents of Judgment Day. We are also going to learn a lot about Judgment Day itself. And we are also going to look at what happens after Judgment Day on into eternity.

1:20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden

candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

We've learned from earlier verses that the Lord Jesus walks amidst the candlesticks and has seven stars in His right hand, and that the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches. Why does He call them stars? One reason: Christ Himself is called a star. We read in Revelation 22:16, for example, "I Jesus have sent mine angel [messenger] to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." He is called a star because He is the light of the world. The stars bring light in a world of darkness. (Christ is also called the sun, as we saw in verse 16, where the countenance of Christ was as the sun shining in His strength.)

Believers are called stars in the Bible, also. We find in Daniel 12:3 this statement: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." We are called stars because we also are the light of the world. It is a reflected light, to be sure, because it comes from the Lord Jesus.

The church. Going back to verse 20, we see that the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches. The church is that which shines the Gospel into the world. God the Holy Spirit works through it to evangelize the world. The seven churches represent every congregation faithful to the Word of God that will exist throughout the New Testament period. Seven is the number of perfection and represents the whole body of believers that will come into being throughout the New Testament period.

The last phrase of verse 20 reads, "and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

Remember we saw in our study earlier in this chapter that the church is said to be a candlestick because they are the light of the world? God has entrusted the light of the Gospel to us so that we might send it out into the world.

Revelation 2

*Lesson 3 for Revelation 2:1-11 ~ "Messages to Two Churches"*³

2:1. Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

Here, again, when the word "angel" is translated as "messenger", the sentence begins to make sense, because the church is a messenger of the gospel. While the whole church of Christ is the messenger of God, God is writing now to one particular messenger, the church at Ephesus.

The seven churches addressed in Revelation 2 and 3 were all located in the part of the world that is now the nation of Turkey. There was a flourishing Christian witness then in that land. Being outside of the nation of Israel, Asia Minor was on the forefront of the world itself. Today, there is no witness of any consequence in Turkey. Just as He warned in Revelation 2 and 3, God has removed His candlesticks from those churches.

All churches. As I pointed out in our study of Revelation 1:4, these seven churches represent

the whole New Testament church. So, the messages given them are meant for us as well. As we read about these churches, therefore, we should take heed of the warnings.

The Lord reminds us in this verse that He holds us in His hand. He is the one who gives us strength; He is the one in whom we rest. The Lord also walks in the midst of us. He is totally interrelated with the church.

2:2. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and has found them liars.

In "I know thy works, and thy labour", we are put on notice that everything that happens in our congregation is known by God. He knows, for example, whether or not we are faithful to His Word and obedient to His commands, and whether or not our pastor is preaching the true gospel from the pulpit. He knows when we change the rules He has laid down in the Bible and substitute them with our own. Nothing escapes His knowledge.

Patience. God does have some good things to say about this church at Ephesus. It's about their "patience". This word "patience", which we will find repeated many times, signifies endurance. It is the same word used in Hebrews 12:2, where God talks about Christ having endured the cross.

A congregation, as well as individual believers, has much to endure. The world slanders and reviles us. Even loved ones and friends let us down. And we ourselves fall into besetting sins and must endure the chastisements of God. God puts all this in our lives to help us grow in faith.

To live with this, we have to learn to be patient. And Romans 5:3 tells us how such patience, or endurance, is developed: "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience." Similarly, in James 1:3 we read, "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." One of the hallmarks of a child of God is that he is patient.

False apostles. There is one area, however, where our patience should come to a rapid end. That is implied in the next phrase, "and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." God commends the church at Ephesus for not having accommodated those that are evil and liars within the congregation.

II Peter 2:1 warns, "But there were false prophets also among the people even as there shall be false teachers among you who privily shall bring in damnable heresies." We should never be so naive as to think that just because we are in a Bible-teaching church, everyone among us is a child of God. We must be on the lookout for those within the congregation who bring in heresy, or doctrines that are contrary to the Word of God.

Note that these "liars" call themselves apostles. The word "apostle" literally means a messenger, a sent one – someone who serves as Christ's ambassador proclaiming His gospel. Anyone who considers himself an ambassador of Christ could call himself an apostle. We don't call ourselves apostles today, however, out of deference to the Twelve and the Apostle Paul, who were especially endowed to do the signs and wonders and works of power as the Lord Jesus Himself did.

Here at Ephesus, there were people claiming that they were apostles, called of God to bring the gospel. But, after having listened to them, the congregation found that they were not true to the Word of God. They were tried and found to be liars. The Lord was pleased with that.

Deceived by Satan. Do all those who preach another gospel purposely lie and have no integrity of any kind? Not necessarily. Jesus

says in Matthew 7:22,23, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

You see, while these workers of iniquity are liars, they themselves were convinced that they were telling the truth. Otherwise, they would not be arguing with God at the Judgment throne. The problem was that they had been deluded by God (II Thes. 2:11) or deceived by Satan. They were preaching a wrong gospel without knowing that they were lying.

This is very much happening today, of course. Many who are teaching doctrines that are not based on the Bible alone and in its entirety consider themselves ministers of the gospel. But most pastors are reluctant to evaluate the work of a fellow pastor and pass judgment as to whether or not that individual should continue in the ministry.

2:3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and has not fainted.

This is an impressive statement to the church at Ephesus. Twice in two verses, Christ talks about its patience. God considers it an important attribute of this congregation. The church at Ephesus was hardly a perfect congregation, but where there was something to be complimented, Christ was ready to say so.

The last phrase of verse 3 declares, "And hast not fainted." The word "fainted" is translated in Hebrews 12:3 as "be wearied". This church at Ephesus was vibrant; it was a congregation where the work of the Lord Jesus was being done. God complimented them for their not having become wearied.

2:4. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Frequently when a congregation comes into being, those who are involved are filled with zeal and desire to be faithful to the Word; they are careful in their choice of the pastor and elders; and they are eager to send forth the gospel.

But as the church grows, the ideals of the founders are somewhat forgotten. Practices that are not as God-glorifying as they should gain headway in the church. Certain doctrines that are not true to the Bible are tolerated. And the desire to carry out the Great Commission gives way to other considerations.

Self-examination. Look at our own congregation. Are we still as zealous for the Word of God, for the holiness of God, and for being obedient to Christ as we were when we first started? Or have we gradually changed in an effort to become more popular, to increase the membership, or to placate those who don't want to hear certain doctrines? Has our church started tolerating various sins and bringing in unbiblical, worldly practice because it is popular in another congregation?

Every congregation has to stand very carefully, making sure that it is as faithful as possible to the Word of God, both in doctrine and in practice. Regardless of what other churches and denominations may be doing, we have to answer to God for our own actions.

There is a direct parallel to the individual believer's life. If we live out our life by consensus, then we are apt to go down a wrong path. The bottom line is not what most other people do, but what the Bible says. If we consistently put obedience to the total Word of God as our top priority, then the Lord will not say of us, "This I have against thee, thou hast left thy first love."

2:5: Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

³ *New Life Digest*, Second Quarter 1995.

[Original Series – Revelation 2:1-7 "Message to Seven Churches", *NLD*, December 1987; Revelation 2:8-11 "To the Church in Smyrna", *NLD*, January 1988.]

Why would God issue such a dreadful warning against this church at Ephesus, where there are so many God-glorifying things going on? True, they have lost their first love; they are not as faithful and obedient as the church was in the beginning. But it would stand head and shoulders above most other congregations.

The answer is implicit in the fact that God uses the word "repent" twice; He emphasizes the importance of turning around. You see, the Lord knows the path of sin. Once a congregation starts down its path, accepting practices and doctrines that may not seem too bad at first; it will end up deeper and deeper in apostasy. Sin breeds sin. And as true believers leave the congregation in response, the remainder will be even more apostate. That's why repenting is so urgent.

Worse yet, when God sees an unrepenting congregation persistently heading down a path of sin, He will blind them so that they will sin even more. God did this with the nation of Israel. He was patient with them for a long time, but they kept rebelling against Him. Finally God said to Isaiah (6:9), "Go to these people and teach them, and they will not understand because I have blinded them and closed their ears." So it is with New Testament congregations.

Great apostasy. In fact, the Bible says that as the end of time approaches, the church will become more and more apostate. We see this in Matthew 24:24 vividly: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." The elect are the true believers. They are found where the true gospel is normally proclaimed. But now, because their church has become overrun by false prophets, they could be deceived, if it were possible.

We are already witnessing this happening today. In more and more congregations, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ has been turned into social or signs-and-wonders gospels, it has been turned into gospels that are patterned after the desires of men rather than the will of God.

2:6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Now, Christ has one more good thing to say about this church at Ephesus. They hate something that Christ also hates. It is the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

We can't tell exactly who the Nicolaitans were, so we don't know precisely how to understand this. But we can at least draw some tentative conclusions. In verses 14 and 15 of this chapter, where God addresses the church at Pergamos, Christ equates the doctrine of the Nicolaitans with the activity of Balaam of the Old Testament.

Balaam. In Numbers 25:1-3, we read that the nation of Israel became adulterous, worshipping other gods and joining with Baalpeor. All of that angered the Lord greatly, who then killed 24,000 Israelites with a plague. God identifies the culprit as Balaam in Numbers 31:16: "Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor."

Since God equates the corruption caused by Balaam with the actions of the Nicolaitans, the latter were probably a group within the congregation that subverts the true doctrines and gospel.

The first deacons. In Acts 6, we read about the appointment of the first seven deacons. They were to care for believers physically, so that the other disciples could concentrate on preaching the gospel. Among the seven was Nicolas, a non-Jew who had come from Antioch and who was evidently a man totally involved in the early church. The word Nicolaitans comes from the word Nicolas. Conceivably, this sect or false gospel that developed in the early church

carried his name. We are speculating, of course, because nowhere in the Bible does God link Nicolas directly with the Nicolaitans, except by that name. But that is a very unusual name, one not found anywhere else in the Scripture.

In II Peter Chapter 2, God speaks about false prophets who have arisen from among you. The normal place from which those who seek to destroy the church come is inside the church; they don't come from the outside. It is not too far-fetched, therefore, that this Nicolas was indeed the beginning of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. It would be equivalent to Balaam's corrupting the Israelites.

2:7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

What does the first phrase "He that hath an ear, let him hear" mean? Don't we all have ears? Of course, we do. But we can never hear what God has to say to us unless God opens our spiritual ears to hear. In other words, we cannot and will not hear unless God has saved us. Only when He saves us does He give us a new heart and a desire to do His will. We then listen intently to what He says through His Word because we want to be obedient.

Thus, through the instructions given to these seven churches, God is telling those within our congregations who have truly been born from above to listen carefully. When they see practices or doctrines in their church that are contrary to the will of God, they should be concerned. As individual church members, of course, we cannot excommunicate another member. But we can pray that God might open the hearts of our church leaders, talk to them about what we see, and show them from the Word where they have gone wrong.

Even so, during the final tribulation, the period that shortly precedes the last day, little can be done to stop unbiblical practices and doctrines from proliferating. Most churches will keep going down the wrong path, and the abomination of desolation will indeed be standing in the holy place. Then, as Matthew 24:15 warns, we must rely all the more on the Bible to find truth.

Overcomers. The next phrase is, "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life". This word "overcome" is translated from the Greek word *nikao*, which means to be victorious, or to conquer.

How do we overcome? How do we conquer? Not by our own strength or ability. We read in I John 5:4,5, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" In other words, we overcome when we have become saved. The same truth is found in Romans 8:37: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loves us."

Who loves us? The Lord Jesus Christ. So, through Christ, We are more than conquerors.

Later on, when we get to Revelation 6, we will see that the rider on the white horse goes forth to conquer. That is the Lord Jesus Christ sending forth the gospel into the world. He has conquered sin and vanquished Satan. That is why we, who are in Christ, can stand as those who have vanquished Satan.

Conquering Satan is also implicit in I John 2. We read in verse 13, "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one," and in verse 14, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

Because we have overcome Satan, the wicked one, we can go out boldly with the gospel to assault his kingdom. We never have to fear him.

God may allow Satan to persecute us, but all those whom God plans to save will be saved.

Tree of Life. Now, what does "I give to eat of the tree of life" mean? The Lord Jesus Christ is the tree of life. He is the One that we eat of. After Adam and Eve had sinned, they were driven out of the garden of Eden lest they eat of that tree that was planted therein and live forever. But now, that tree of life is in heaven; and if we are in heaven, we eat of the fruit of that tree.

In Revelation 22:2, God speaks again about that tree of life: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves for the tree were for the healing of the nations." And verse 14 reads, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

Later on, when we study that verse in greater detail, we will see that those who have eaten of the tree of life enter into the city of God through the gate which is the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the evidence of our having entered into the city of God is that we want to be obedient to Him.

Paradise. This tree of life is in the midst of the paradise of God. Where is paradise? There are only three places in the Bible where we find the word "paradise". This is one of them. Another is in II Corinthians 12. In verse 2, the apostle Paul speaks of his having been caught up into "the third heaven" where he heard things so glorious that he could not mention. Then in verse 4, he says he was caught up into paradise.

Finally, remember the thief on the cross was told by Jesus: "Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise"? Now, when a Christian dies (that thief died a believer), he leaves his body and goes in his spirit essence to be with God in Heaven. Paradise is therefore in heaven.

So, in Revelation 2:7, God is saying that those who have overcome – that is, those who have been saved – eat of the tree of life which is in heaven. They partake of the Lord Jesus Christ and are nourished by Him and the gospel. It is a statement of God's beautiful care over those who belong to Him.

2:8. And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.

God is now addressing the church at Smyrna, although all of the statements He makes apply to everyone of us as well. Again, God underscores His preeminence. He is the first and the last; He is from everlasting to everlasting. We must always keep this fact in mind. While we have been adopted as sons of God and have become joint heirs with Christ, we are still the creature, while the Lord Jesus Christ is always eternal God, the Creator.

This statement also stresses that there is everlasting life because Jesus has risen. He is the one who brings us into resurrection because He was dead and now is alive.

2:9a. I know thy works, and tribulation and poverty, (but thou art rich).

Again, God begins His message by driving home the point that what goes on in every congregation is fully known by Him. He is not only deeply concerned with everything we do, but is intimately aware of every trial or tribulation we undergo.

But why do we have to suffer tribulation? As a church of Christ, shouldn't we enjoy all kinds of wonderful blessings? Indeed, Ephesians 1:3 states that in Christ, God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies. But on this earth, we are just strangers and pilgrims.

Christ suffered. When Jesus was on earth, He was under tribulation. He was reviled, misunderstood and slandered. He suffered because the kingdom of light He came to proclaim and head up is totally antithetical to the

kingdom of darkness, the world ruled by Satan. The world hated Him and caused Him much suffering.

Now, we are to complete Christ's sufferings. We read in I Peter 2:21, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." Just as Jesus suffered as He came to bring the gospel, we now suffer as we send forth the gospel.

The tribulation may develop right within our own congregation. Because of man's sinful nature and Satan's efforts to undercut the church, misunderstandings and divisions will arise. Tribulation will also come from the outside because the world despises us. But wonderfully, God says, "I know thy works and tribulations". God has not abandoned us. That the Lord knows about our tribulation is a comfort to us.

Poverty. God says He also knows about the poverty of the church at Smyrna. Physical poverty is in view here because He, referring to the church's spiritual wealth, says in the next phrase, "but thou art rich." Materially, this was a poor church.

The churches of Macedonia were also poor, and God also has some good things to say about them: "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (II Cor. 8:1-4).

A famine was in the land and there was great suffering in Jerusalem. These churches in Macedonia, which themselves were in deep affliction and poverty, rose to the challenge and gave with all their might. In fact, they gave more than Paul had expected, pressing their gifts on him. So, God commended those churches for their generous giving.

Often, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between physical poverty and trials on the one hand and spiritual riches and joy on the other. This is something the world can never understand.

The poor widow. We see this also in the story of the widow and her two mites (Mark 12:41-43). Jesus was watching people casting money into the temple treasury. The rich came along and cast in their gold and silver, which were princely gifts. Along came a widow with two mites. Equivalent to but a tiny part of what a person would earn in that day, it was nevertheless her entire living. In her physical poverty, she cast all she had into the temple treasury, trusting God to provide her next meal. And the Lord singled this poor widow out for commendation. What a blessing!

What does all this tell us? Often, we have the naive notion that if we are a child of God we can expect a materially abundant life. Well, that was not the case with the widow, the Macedonian churches and the church at Smyrna. They were physically poor. Yet, they were richly blessed by God. That's why God says to the church at Smyrna here in Revelation 2:9, "but thou art rich." You see, the Kingdom of God is not of this world; it is not concerned with physical things. Christ went to the cross to give us spiritual blessings, to make us rich in faith, mercy and good works.

2:9b. And I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

What is this synagogue of Satan that is blaspheming? (To blaspheme means to talk rebelliously and deceptively against God.) Is God talking about people who claim to be blood

descendants of Abraham, but are really Gentiles? Not at all.

In the Bible, God talks about two kinds of Jews. The blood descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob are called Jews; they are national Israel. But God has another Israel – the Israel of God. It includes everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are the ones for whom Christ died. God calls them Jews just as certainly as he does the blood descendants of Abraham.

Spiritual Israel. In the New Testament, as a matter of fact, God speaks far more often about the Israel of God than He does of national Israel. We read, for example, in Romans 2:28: "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly..." A blood descendant of Abraham is a Jew outwardly because he has been circumcised. But in this verse, God is saying that such a person is not necessarily a Jew as far as the Israel of God is concerned. (The same truth is stated in Romans 9:6: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.")

Romans 2:28 continues "...neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." God is talking about the circumcision that He Himself puts on us believers. He has circumcised the foreskins of our hearts.

In Philippians 3:3, God says, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoiceth in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh." Believers rejoice in Christ Jesus; national Israel, as a nation, does not. (Within the nation, though, there has always been a trickle of believers. Individual Jews have been saved. They are the remnant chosen by grace.)

Union with Christ. Why are believers called Jews? Because we are in Christ; we are united with Christ. Jesus was a descendant of Abraham and David, He was of the tribe of Judah. He was decidedly a Jew. He was also Israel because the word Israel means "prince of God" and Christ, of course, is the prince of God. Since Jesus was a Jew and since we are united with Him, we are rightly called Jews.

In Revelation 2:9, therefore, the Lord has in mind the Israel of God when He uses the word "Jews". He is saying there that those who claim to be believers but are not really saved are blaspheming God. They are blaspheming God, or saying things against God because they are bringing doctrines that are contrary to the Bible.

Synagogue of Satan. Just as God does not regard unbelievers as spiritual Jews, He does not consider any denomination or congregation that brings a gospel other than that of the Bible to be a part of His church. Instead, He describes it as "the synagogue of Satan", or the church of Satan.

God repeatedly warns us to watch out for such false denominations and congregations. We read, for example, in Matthew 24:24, "For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." So closely do these false Christians resemble the true ones that in II Corinthians 11, God warns of Satan transforming himself as an angel of light; and his ministers, as ministers of righteousness. Ultimately, any church or denomination whose divine authority is other than the Bible alone and in its entirety is a church of Satan. This is ugly language, but this matter of having a gospel that is not true to the Word of God is serious.

2:10. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

From the term "ten days", one might infer that the problem confronting this congregation, will not

last very long and that relief will come shortly thereafter. But the next phrase denies such a conclusion. It says, "Be thou faithful unto death." Apparently, some may even die while they are in prison.

Actually, God frequently uses the number 10, 100, 1,000 or 10,000 not in a literal sense, but to indicate the completeness of His plan, whatever it might be. For example, the 100 sheep in the parable of the lost sheep and the ten coins the woman had in the parable of the lost coin both represent the completeness of all believers.

And in Psalm 105:8, God speaks of the Word as that "which he commanded to a thousand generations." We know He is not referring to a literal thousand generations, because earlier in that same verse, God says He remembers His covenant forever. So, it again stands for the completeness of God's plan, which, in that case, is forever.

Similarly, Revelation 20 uses the term "a thousand years" many, many times. Looking at the context carefully, we see that those thousand years involve many different time periods, depending on whom God is talking about in the particular instance. So, they are also to be understood as representing the completeness of God's plan for those particular instances.

Tribulation. Here in Revelation 2:10, therefore, God is talking about the completeness of His specific plan for those who are under tribulation. How long will we experience tribulation? Or when will the completeness of God's plan for the tribulation come? A careful study of the Scriptures relating to tribulation indicates that it will come only after the church has completed its work on this earth.

Jesus says in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation." And in Matthew 24, where the Lord is speaking of the end-time period, He warns in verse 21, "and then there will be great tribulation such as this world has ever known." These statements tell us (1) that tribulation is normal for the body of Christ in this world; and (2) that it will intensify during the period shortly before the end of time.

Yes, all those who are faithful to the Word of God are to expect tribulation. As I discussed earlier, our lot is to complete the sufferings of Christ. And the more faithful we are to the truth, the greater the affliction we encounter.

Offended. Why? When we declare that all people are sinners subject to be thrown into eternal hell – unless they repent and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ – many are offended. When we admonish that all believers are to deny themselves and forsake the world, those within the congregation who love the world are offended. When we stress that the divine authority for all Christians and all churches must be the Bible alone and in its entirety, those who are interested in signs and wonders and tongues are offended.

As a result, there will be tribulation. Barbs will be thrown, slander will begin. But remember, Jesus says in Matthew 5:10: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

The Lord also says in Matthew 10:28, "fear not them which kill the body, but not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." You see, we need not fear tribulation. The worst that Satan can do to us is to take our lives, but our physical death is simply that marvelous moment when we leave the body and go to live and reign with Christ in heaven.

And this is the very admonition God is giving to the church at Smyrna in Revelation 2:10.

Crown of life. Is the “crown of life” spoken of in the end of the verse some kind of special payment to those who have been especially faithful? No. It is simply another expression of salvation. The crown of life is a figure to indicate that we will reign forevermore with eternal life. At the moment we become saved, only our soul or spirit is given eternal life. But our bodies will receive eternal life later. They will be resurrected on the last day.

The true believers in Christ are those described in this verse as faithful. They have been faithful only because they have been enabled by God to be faithful. As part of God’s salvation package for believers, they will receive the crown of life and reign with Christ eternally. It is nothing that they have earned. There is no aspect of our salvation that we have earned. Eternal life is the reward God freely gives us.

2:11. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

The admonition in the first half of this verse was also given in verse 7 to the church at Ephesus. God underscores that these statements are not just to these seven churches but to every congregation that has ever existed. Only those whose spiritual ears have been opened will hear what is being said and will react to it the right way.

Second death. The second death God talks about here is defined in Revelation 20:14: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” The lake of fire is a figure of eternal damnation; it is the second death. The first death is the physical death that mankind endures.

For both the animal world and the inanimate parts of creation, such as flowers and trees, death is extinction. But for mankind, death brings separation. The first human death occurs when man’s soul leaves his body (James 2:26). The spirit essence of believers go to live and reign with Christ in heaven, while their bodies are put in the grave. In the case of the unsaved, the body is put in the grave and the soul goes down to a place of silence (Psalm 115:17) to await the resurrection and judgment of the last day.

The second death is eternal separation from God. Man was created in the image of God; he is to have some relationship with God. Even mankind in its unsaved condition still enjoys many blessings from God. But in hell, the separation will be total. The second death is thus absolutely horrendous.

Everyone who has become saved experiences his first resurrection when his dead soul was given a new life in Christ. And Revelation 20:6 assures us that “he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power.”

Yes, the true believer cannot be hurt by the second death because Christ has paid for his sins. He is not subject to eternal damnation. This is the marvelous and gracious promise that God reaffirms to every child of God in Revelation 2:11.

Lesson 4 for Revelation 2:12-29 ~ “To Churches in Pergamos and Thyatira”

2:12. And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges.

⁴ *New Life Digest*, Third Quarter 1995. [Original Series – Revelation 2:12-17 “To the Church in Pergamos”, *NLD*, February 1988; Revelation 2:18-29 “To the Church in Thyatira”, *NLD*, March 1988.]

Back in Revelation 1:16, we saw that Christ, standing at Judgment Day, had in His right hand seven stars and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. We learned then that the two-edged sword is the Word of God. It uncovers our sins, causing us to cry out for mercy and become saved, but which also condemns the unsaved on Judgment Day to eternal punishment.

In identifying Himself to this church as “the sharp sword with two edges”, the Lord is emphasizing that He will come back to judge. And the reason why He is using such threatening language can be seen in the next few verses.

2:13. I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

The Lord Jesus is talking about Satan again. In the message addressed to the church at Smyrna, He condemns those who say they are Jews but are in fact “the synagogue of Satan”. Here, He starts by saying that “thou dwellest ... where Satan’s seat is”.

In the Bible, to be seated means to reign. We read in Ephesians 1, for instance, that Christ is seated at the right hand of God reigning over everything. And in II Thessalonians 2, God speaks of the man of sin taking his seat in the temple, which means that Satan, as he comes with his false gospels, will rule in the body of believers.

Satan is said to be reigning in the environments of the church at Pergamos. He has already gained a substantial foothold in the congregation.

Commendation. But this church has not totally sold out to Satan; God has some good things to say about it. Noting that “thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith”, the Lord is pleased that they have remained faithful to the Word of God. On the surface, the commendation and the reference to Satan’s rule seem paradoxical. But the two conditions can indeed exist side by side within the same church.

Take, for instance, the church at Corinth. In the opening verses of his first letter to that church, the Apostle Paul uses some very complimentary language to address them. Judging by those verses, one might draw the conclusion that all members in that church were faithful, born-again believers. Yet, the language of Chapters 2 and 3 reveals that many in that church were in fact unbelievers; they are described as being carnal.

Actually such a mixture is quite typical of most congregations. In every church, there are those who dearly love the Lord and truly desire to do His will. But there are also those who want Christ as their Savior, but who want the world as well. They are unwilling to give up what the world has to offer. James 4:4 warns, “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” We cannot serve two masters. Those who are not willing to give up the world are not really saved.

Persecution. The Bible has given us no other information about this Antipas. But this verse reveals that the church at Pergamos was experiencing severe persecution, so much so that one of its members was killed for his faith in Christ. Throughout the history of the church, many believers have forfeited their lives for the sake of Christ. They loved their Savior and trusted Him when He said, “Don’t fear him that can destroy the body. Fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

Very few Christians in today’s western world, I am afraid, are prepared to stand up for Jesus to such a degree. In fact, many pastors and congregations would rather change God’s commands than risk losing friends or church

members. Even prominent church leaders often dare not stand up and be counted for fear that, if they did, they would no longer be part of the “in” crowd in Christendom.

Faithful martyr. But Christ wants to encourage us to “be thou faithful unto death”. He makes it a point to call Antipas “my faithful martyr”. Jesus laid down His life for His people, His children, His friends. Not surprisingly, He is pleased when a believer trusts Him enough to be willing to die for Him.

So, whether it is death by martyrdom or death that comes at the end of a natural life on this earth, we need to have a constancy in our faithfulness. If we have a willing and obedient heart, the Lord will give us the needed strength and courage to stand firm.

Significantly, God begins this verse by talking about “where Satan’s seat is” and He closes the verse with “where Satan dwelleth”. In between the two references to Satan, He commends Antipas for his martyrdom. Effectively, therefore, He is saying that whenever Satan attacks and tries to rule our congregations, He wants us to stand up for Christ at all costs.

2:14. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

In the Book of Numbers in the Old Testament, we read about a wicked soothsayer called Balaam. He was asked by Balak (or Balac), the king of the Moabites, to come and curse Israel. At first, God told Balaam not to go. But because Balaam persisted in wanting to go, God gave him permission but made him say only what God put in his mouth.

Balaam went. And to Balak’s consternation, he repeatedly uttered great and wonderful prophecies concerning Israel. Every time he tried to curse Israel, blessings came out instead. But Balak still won. Numbers 25:1 records: “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. They called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods; and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined herself unto Baalpeor, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.”

Instigated by Balaam, the children of Israel committed the terrible sin of going after other gods. That was spiritual fornication. It was so grievous that God sent a terrible plague that killed thousands of them.

Damnableness. People in the church at Pergamos were not worshipping the idols of Moab, of course. God uses the phrase “them that hold the doctrine of Balaam” to describe those who are running after false gospels.

We know that from II Peter 2, where God equates another group to Balaam. He describes them in verse 15 as those “which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.”

Whom is He referring to? The people He has spoken of since the start of the chapter. He says in verse 1: But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

In other words, those false prophets and teachers within the congregation who deceitfully bring heretical doctrines into the church are regarded by God as having forsaken the right way to follow the way of Balaam.

False leaders. Indeed, heresy seldom comes from the outside; it normally starts from those who are among the rulers of the congregation. When a layman tries to introduce a wrong

doctrine, faithful church leaders will simply say, "Don't trust that man. He is not qualified to be listened to."

But when a pastor, a noted Bible teacher or a seminary professor makes statements that are contrary to the Word of God, he often goes unchallenged. The Bible tells us to obey those who rule over the congregation, and implies that we should listen also to our teachers and learn from them. So, when such a person comes with a false doctrine, most people in the congregation just take for granted that he knows what he is talking about and therefore slavishly follow along.

Nevertheless, in James 3:1, God warns, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." Elsewhere, the Lord declares that if we should lead any of these little ones astray, it would be better that we be cast into the sea with a millstone hung about our necks. Those who bring wrong doctrines are going to find their eternal lot in the lowest hell. To be a Bible teacher is thus quite a serious matter.

2:15. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Remember when we looked at the church at Ephesus, we found that one of the seven deacons that had been appointed along with Stephen and Phillip was a man by the name of Nicolas? Although we cannot be absolutely certain, he might have been the one who started the heretical doctrine of the Nicolaitans mentioned in this verse. The word Nicolaitan directly identifies with the name Nicolas.

If so, it would match what we read in II Peter 2, where it says that false teachers have arisen from among you. In some churches, deacons have the responsibility of teaching. And Nicolas, having been appointed a deacon, must have won over the trust of the leaders and members of the congregation. He was in a position to secretly introduce false doctrines.

But whether Nicolas was responsible or not, we do know that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was antithetical to the truth and Christ hated it. It was described in II Peter 2 as damnable heresies that lead to damnation, rather than eternal life.

Apostate church. Can this happen today? It not only can, but it is happening. The Bible teaches that toward the end of time, when nearly all of the elect will have become saved, God will begin to close the era of the New Testament church, just as He closed the era of the Old Testament church. He will increasingly allow false prophets and teachers to dominate denominations and congregations.

By the time Christ returns – in other words, by the time when all of God's chosen people have at last received salvation – the prevailing corporate church will have largely become apostate. Oh yes, there will always be a church here and a church there that remain faithful to the teaching of the Bible. But most congregations will then be presenting gospels other than the true one, and many of them will be featuring signs and wonders.

We wonder how could a true church of Jesus Christ turn apostate? Well, it takes place gradually and insidiously as church leaders begin to rewrite rules and doctrines to suit what they want, or what they think is more popular than that which the Bible declares. The congregation goes along because they trust their leaders, or because they prefer the new rules over the biblical ones, or both.

Take, for example, the question of marriage and divorce. As recently as 40 or 50 years ago, there was no divorce and remarriage in the typical congregation of Jesus Christ. Now, in virtually every denomination, rules have been set forth to permit them. Other changes involve the role of women in the congregation and

doctrines on the rapture and the nature of salvation.

Some of the church leaders that are responsible for this sad state of affairs do not even realize that Christ hates what they have done to His church. They have been deceived by Satan.

Satan in disguise. In II Corinthians 11, God speaks of Satan masquerading as an angel of light, and his ministers transforming into ministers of righteousness. Jesus, of course, is the true messenger of light. In other words, while these pastors and teachers are convinced that they are serving the Lord Jesus Christ, they are in fact emissaries of Satan.

These false teachers vindicate their doctrines by getting many people to follow them, by causing the truth to be disparaged, and by exploiting others with made-up stories. We read in II Peter 2:2,3: "Many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned [deceptive] words make merchandise of [exploit] you."

God, through His warning to the church in Pergamos, is thus telling us not to take for granted as truth all the doctrines taught by even respected pastors or Bible teachers. He has given us the Bible, and we as laymen should always search the Scriptures and test what we are taught against His Word.

2:16. Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

When we find teachers in our congregation who are not faithful to the Word of God, what are we to do? This verse tells us to repent. And what does it mean to repent? Isaiah 55:7 says, "Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord." Repentance is the forsaking of sin and turning to the Lord.

How does a congregation repent? Rulers of the church, unless they themselves are the problem, must order the one preaching false doctrines to stop and, if he persists, excommunicate him. Remember, excommunication is never done to hurt someone. It is a means to bring one back to truth and be saved.

Unfortunately, church discipline is hardly practiced nowadays. That's because implementing it requires much patience and hard work. Individuals have to be visited, prayed for, counseled and exhorted. But if a church is to remain pure, it must exercise discipline and remove anyone teaching that which is contrary to the Word of God.

What happens if that church does not repent or if the church rulers themselves are guilty? God says here in verse 16, "I will come unto thee quickly and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth." In other words, He will strike them with the Word of God on Judgment Day.

2:17. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Once again, God stresses that what He told the church at Pergamos is to be heeded by all believers. We, whose spiritual ear has been opened, are to hear what the Spirit is saying to the "churches". God then promises to give "him that overcometh" – that is, every individual who remains faithful within a less-than-faithful congregation – hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it.

When the nation of Israel was forty years in the wilderness, there was very little to eat. But God provided food for them miraculously. Each morning, except the Sabbath, there was on the ground a white-looking substance called manna.

It could be eaten in many ways and was complete enough to provide physical health and strength to the people.

Heavenly bread. That manna is a picture of the heavenly bread that sustains us believers, which ultimately is the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." And in its day-by-day substance, it is translated into the Word of God. The Word of God is our "hidden" manna because those whose spiritual eyes have not been opened simply cannot partake of it or appreciate its value. The Bible doesn't mean a thing to the unsaved.

Only when we have become saved can we see and eat the hidden manna. And what a treasure this Living Word of the Living God is! It sustains us as we progress in our pilgrimage through this earth on our way to heaven. It gives us the wherewithal, the authority, the standard, the promises, and the reinforcements that enable us to stand in an evil culture where sin tempts us in every direction.

White stone. The white stone referred to in the second half of this verse is also the Lord Jesus Christ. To the unsaved, He is the stone of stumbling, the stone of judgment. But to true believers, He is the stone upon which the temple is built.

As we've learned earlier, the color white in the Bible is always of that which is holy. This verse, then, tells us again that the children of God, the ones who have overcome, are given the Lord Jesus Christ.

But doesn't the Bible say that we are the ones who have been given to Christ? Yes, we are His possession, His bondservants. However, to describe the intimate relationship that exists between the believer and Christ, God uses language that goes in both directions. We are in Christ, for example, but Christ is also in us. He indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit.

So intimate is this relationship that the Bible likens it to that which exists between a husband and his wife. That can be most comforting when we go through trials, when things are beyond what we can bear. In Isaiah 43:2, God says, "When you go through deep waters, I will go with you."

New name. The new name written on the stone is the name that identifies us with the family of God. In Revelation 3:12 (which we will look at later in greater detail), Jesus says, "Him that overcometh will I...write upon him the name of my God." So, the Lord has written the Father's name on us. Here in 2:17, though, the name is written on the stone, or Christ, that has been given us. By this two-way language, God again stresses the intimacy that exists between the believer and Christ.

This name of God is a name no man knows except the person who has received it. Why? Because unbelievers have no idea who God is, what the name of God stands for. They just don't know God. Believers, on the other hand, "have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Only the person who has been saved knows God and values His name.

2:18. And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.

This is the first time the Lord identifies Himself as "Son of God" in these letters. It emphasizes that He is God and that He is speaking with great authority. The description of His eyes, almost the same as that in Revelation 1:14, reiterates that when Christ comes to judge the unsaved, His eyes will search out every sin.

Likewise, the reference to His feet echoes Revelation 1:15, which reads "and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace." Again, it points to the fact that Christ had to

suffer the wrath of God for our sins in order to satisfy God's perfect justice. For that reason, no unsaved person can expect to escape the wrath of God on Judgment Day.

2:19. I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

As we go on with this message, we will see why God uses such stern language to introduce this letter. But He has some good things to say to this church first.

He tells them that He is aware of their "charity" (an old English word that means "love"), their faith and patience, and the way they have served Him. He commends them for the growth in their ministries, the last being more than the first. In many ways, then, this congregation has grown in grace.

2:20. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Nevertheless, this church has among them a woman whom God likens to the Jezebel of the Old Testament. That Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, the king of the northern nation of Israel back in the first century BC. She was a very wicked woman. One of the first things she did was to seek out and kill the prophets of the Lord. She also caused Ahab to worship other gods and commit many terrible sins. I Kings 21:25 records that Ahab "did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up".

God was so angry at Jezebel that He eventually had her thrown from a wall and eaten by dogs so that nothing was left of her to be buried. In the Old Testament, not having a proper burial was a symbol of a person who was under the extreme curse of God.

In God's eye, evidently, Jezebel was the very essence of wickedness. Not only was she herself rebellious against the Lord, she also "stirred up" Ahab into worshipping false gods and committing grievous sins.

Woman teachers. The Lord is using the symbol of Jezebel to warn the Thyatira church for allowing a woman to teach in their church. This is an outright act of disobedience. In I Corinthians 14:34, God declares flatly that women are to be silent in the churches. To underscore it, He says in the next verse that if women want to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. In I Timothy 2:12, the Lord further reiterates the point, saying, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man."

Note that God says this woman "calleth herself a prophetess", implying that she is a self-proclaimed prophetess. In the New Testament era, any woman believer is a prophetess. But although this woman claims and believes that she is a believer, the Lord indicates that she is not really saved. The fact that she wants to teach also attests to that.

Spiritual harlotry. God faults the Thyatira church leaders not only for allowing her to teach, but for letting her seduce others "to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols". In other words, just as Jezebel made Ahab worship other gods, this woman is enticing people in that church to follow other gospels.

Whenever we go after gospels other than that of the Bible, we are committing spiritual fornication. And whenever we accept heretical doctrines over what is taught by the Word of God, we are eating spiritual things sacrificed unto idols.

2:21. I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

God is patient, however. He gave this woman a chance to repent, but she has refused to do so. Meanwhile, the fact that this woman is still

teaching in the congregation means that the leaders of the church have been equally disobedient. They, too, have refused to repent.

You might wonder how could this woman and those in the church involved be so stubborn after God has given them a distinct command and a chance to repent. But isn't that what's happening in today's churches?

The Word of God clearly forbids women teaching in the church. Yet, more and more congregations have allowed women to teach. Some denominations have even ordained women to become pastors. Responding to social pressures, they have opted to placate people by changing biblical rules, rather than obeying God's command. And when this act of disobedience is called to the attention of those churches, seldom are their spiritual leaders willing to repent.

2:22. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

Figuratively, the word "bed" is used in the Bible in two senses: it may mean a bed of affliction or a place where adulterous activity goes on. And both senses apply here. Punishment is coming to the woman, and she will get deeper and deeper into the sin of spiritual harlotry.

In II Thessalonians 2, where God is talking about the end of time, we read in verses 11 and 12: "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

It means that when we sin, a dynamic between us and God comes into play. If we are a child of God, we would repent after we have been warned by the Word of God. But if we are unsaved and persist in rebelling, God will actually blind us so that we will go deeper and deeper into sin, thereby heaping up judgment after judgment upon ourselves.

The deceived. Along with the woman that claims to be a prophetess, those who are snared by her false doctrines and gospels will also get deeper and deeper in spiritual harlotry. And God warns that they will all come into great tribulation.

The word "tribulation", translated from the Greek word *thlipsis*, is almost always used in the Bible to mean trials for believers in this life. Remember Jesus says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33)? But twice in the Bible, it applies to unbelievers within the corporate church body. This is one of those passages. (The other is II Thessalonians 1:6-8.) In these two cases, eternal damnation is in view.

What God is teaching here, then, is that no matter how religious or righteous a person appears, if he worships other gods – that is, if he goes after false gospels – he is unsaved, and is subject to eternal damnation.

2:23. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

God repeats this warning by using the unusual language: "I will kill her children with death." The seeming redundancy of killing with death emphasizes that the Lord is talking about the second death.

You see, animals have only one death. When they die, they simply cease to exist. But human beings have a soul that continues to exist after the body dies. And to die the second death is to be forever separated from any blessing, any mercy and any grace of God. That's hell!

No one on this side of the grave has ever experienced that kind of hell. Even the most wicked person enjoys many blessings from God. He can feel the warm sun in the winter, for example, and enjoy the love of another human.

But in hell, everyone is totally shut out from the presence of the Lord.

The word "reins" means kidneys. "To search the reins and hearts" is a figure to stress that God searches even the innermost thoughts of every person. On Judgment Day, He will punish the unsaved for every single sin committed.

2:24. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

Note that God is addressing not just the church in Thyatira, but "the rest in Thyatira" as well. Meaning: besides this church, there are other Christians, or perhaps even other congregations in the city.

There are those who contend that there shouldn't be different denominations within the body of Christ. Well, the Lord Jesus Christ recognizes here that not all believers in the City of Thyatira are necessarily in the church of Thyatira.

Actually, even before Jesus went to the cross, He had revealed this truth. We read in Luke 9:49 that the Apostle John came to Jesus and said, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us." John did not think someone outside the apostolic band should engage in the work of Christ. But Jesus said unto him, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."

The fact is, there is no perfect church or denomination. Minor differences in Scripture interpretations are inevitable. As long as these denominations earnestly seek truth from the Word of God, their differences should be limited. It is heretical, of course, for any denomination to misrepresent major biblical doctrines, especially the doctrine of salvation by grace. But that's an altogether separate matter.

"The depths of Satan" in this verse refers to hell. Although Satan still rules in the hearts of unsaved men at present, he has been consigned to hell as a result of Christ's victory on the cross. Thus, Revelation 20:3 pictures Satan as already being in a "bottomless pit". Those who have "known the depths of Satan, as they speak" are, therefore, those who preach the false doctrines or gospels of the hell-bound Satan.

Living for Christ. The thrust of verse 24 is that upon the faithful believers, God will not put any other burden. Other than what burden? Certainly not any works in connection with our salvation. It has to do with the burden of living for Christ.

Many like to think that everything will go well with them once they become Christians. But in reality, our problems usually mount after we have begun to put our trust in Christ. For one thing, Hebrews 12:7 reminds us that because we are now God's children, He will chastise us from time to time. He does it to strengthen our faith and to increase our dependence on Him. In fact, verse 8 warns, if we are not disciplined, then we are not really His children.

Also, the more obedient we are to God, the more we will be looked upon with disdain by others. We live in an alien world. Jesus says, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world... therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

But remember when you are being tried, Christ promises in John 16:33: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world", and here in Revelation 2:24, "I will put upon you none other burden."

2:25. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

This letter is written in the first instance to the Church in Thyatira. Was God telling the believers who were living nearly 2,000 years ago to hold fast till He literally returns on the clouds

of glory? Of course not. But effectively, Christ comes to every person at the moment of his death.

When a believer dies, according to II Corinthians 5:8, his soul leaves his body and goes to be with the Lord. For the unsaved, the dead body goes to the ground, and the soul goes to a place of silence (Psalm 115:17), where there is no conscious existence (Rev. 20:5). Then, the next thing he consciously knows is that he has been resurrected on the Last Day and is standing before God for judgment.

So, the Lord is exhorting all believers to be faithful till they die or, in the case of the very last generation on earth, till He literally returns on the clouds of glory. Of course, only believers are able to endure and hold fast because they are strengthened by God Himself. Those who cannot endure but fall away were never saved to begin with.

2:26. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.

As we learned earlier, to overcome means to be victorious. To keep the works of God is to do the will of God. And again, "to the end" means to the end of each believer's life, or the end of the world, whichever comes first. Thus, God is promising each believer that He will give him power over the nations. The word "power" means authority. In other words, we who have put our trust in the Lord will be given the authority to judge the nations.

This same truth is found in I Corinthians 6, where we read, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?...that we shall judge angels?" (vv. 2,3). These are remarkable statements. We not only will not come into judgment when Christ returns, but will instead take part in judging the unsaved.

2:27. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

In Psalm 2, God prophesies that the unsaved heathen of this world, who are in persistent rebellion against God, will be given to the Lord Jesus and that "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (v. 9).

When a potter smashes an imperfect vessel with a rod of iron into shivers, or tiny little fragments, it can never be put together again into a whole vessel. This is the figure God uses when He speaks of us judging the world on the Last Day. The unsaved will be condemned to hell forever. Never again will they be reconstituted as a person who can live with the joys and blessings of this life.

Jesus Himself has been given by the Father the authority to judge. So, we will be judging with Him by His authority. He is the only one worthy to receive this power. And "He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:15).

2:28,29. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The morning star that every believer will receive is the Lord Jesus Christ. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus declares, "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." You see, the morning star is the first star that rises when the night is passed. And Christ is the one who came with the light of the gospel to bring an end to the dark era of sin.

The closing statement of this message is the same as that of the last few letters. It emphasizes that what God is saying to the church of Thyatira is, in fact, for the ear of all people.

Revelation 3

*Lesson 5 for Revelation 3:1-13 ~ "To Churches in Sardis and Philadelphia"*⁵

3:1. Unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; these things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

We have seen in Revelation 1:4 that the term "seven Spirits" has to do particularly with the perfection of the Holy Spirit in evangelizing the world; and in verse 20 that the seven stars refer to the messengers of the seven churches.

Thus, the Lord is stressing here that He is the One who has sent the Holy Spirit to evangelize the world and who has commissioned the churches to send forth the gospel. And with the statement "thou art dead," He is showing His displeasure with this congregation's failure to carry out its duty.

Once again, God says "I know thy works." He knows exactly what is going on in every single church.

Empty facade. Haven't you heard people say how lively such and such a church is? Typically, that church is considered lively because it has lots of programs and activities going on. Conceivably, the church in Sardis was something like that. But the Lord is saying here that a church that looks alive can in fact be spiritually dead.

To understand that, we need to recognize first that whether a church is alive or dead has nothing to do with the number of its Sunday school classes, the size of its choir, the popularity of its pastor, the scope of its mid-week activities, or the "fellowship" and love that exist among its members. Rather, a church is alive only when it is doing the work of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And what work is that? To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. That is how God Himself defines it in Ephesians 4:12.

Jesus also says, "As the Father hath sent me so send I you" (John 20:21) and "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The task of every church, therefore, is to strengthen its members in the Word of God so that they are well equipped to bring the gospel to the nations.

Divided interests. Evidently, the church in Sardis failed to do that. It's not that it had begun to follow a false gospel. God was still holding in His hand the star of this church and was walking among its candlestick (Rev. 1:20). In other words, when the Apostle John saw this vision, God still regarded this congregation as a church of His, using the Bible as its authority.

Many Bible-believing churches today have the same problem. They also look very much alive, but are dead by God's definition. Instead of preparing God's people for works of service toward sending forth the gospel, they are more interested in seeking God's blessings on health and economic sufficiency. Instead of exhorting people to deny themselves, they teach that a person can follow Christ and still concentrate on attaining the worldly goals he has set for his own life.

But no man can serve two masters, the Bible says, he will hate the one and love the other (Matt. 6:24); and we are to crucify the flesh and its desires (Gal. 5:24). When a church ceases to teach the whole Word of God faithfully, it is not doing its work; it is dead.

3:2. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

What does it mean to be watchful? Let's read Ezekiel 33:7-9: "O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul."

You see, having been appointed to be Israel's watchman, Ezekiel must warn that nation of the inevitable judgment from God should it persist in apostasy. If he fails to warn them, God will not only condemn Israel, but will hold Ezekiel responsible. Likewise, God has commissioned the church to warn the unsaved world of eternal damnation, as well as to proclaim the Good News of salvation through Christ. If we fail to do so, God will hold us accountable. By our disobedience, we prove that we ourselves are not really saved.

Yet, most preachers and evangelists today are presenting only half a gospel. They talk about the love and mercy and grace of God, but seldom warn of hell and damnation for the unsaved. When they do, they skip over it as fast as possible. How can anyone know why he needs to be saved if he doesn't know that he is under the wrath of God and is subject to eternal damnation?

Greatest revival. "You can't scare people into heaven," they argue. But do you remember the greatest revival recorded in the Bible? It was in the wicked city of Nineveh. Preached to by the reluctant prophet Jonah, the entire city repented and became saved. How did Jonah preach to them? Did he say, "God loves all of you, Ninevites, so why not make a decision and invite Him into your heart"? No, he simply said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4).

The fact is, the leading edge of the gospel is that God will destroy mankind because of sin. Romans 1:18 declares, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Unless we bring the whole counsel of God, we are a dead church.

The remainder. Wonderfully, God is patient. He has not yet given the church in Sardis up. He tells them to "strengthen the things which remain". What are the remaining things in the Sardis church that could be strengthened? As I noted earlier, they have not begun to follow false gospels. So, they still have the Word of God and the mandate to send the gospel to all nations. By strengthening these basics, they can yet become a vibrant church.

But the strengthening had better come soon. This verse goes on to warn that what's left is "ready to die". God is so displeased with its ministries that He is ready to let this church die. "For I have not found thy works perfect before God," He states. The word "perfect" in this phrase would be more properly translated "full" or "complete". God knows that no church on earth can be perfect. He is saying here, "I have not found your ministries fully or completely carrying out your responsibilities before God."

The one truth that shines through brightly through these two verses is that we mustn't play church. A Christian church is not a social club. Instead of giving what the members want, it must do the work God has assigned to it.

3:3. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

⁵ *New Life Digest*, First Quarter 1996. [Original Series – Revelation 3:1-6 "To the Church in Sardis", *NLD*, April 1988; Revelation 3:7-13 "To the Church in Philadelphia", *NLD*, May 1988.]

God is giving this church a chance to repent. The church was presumably started by some of the original apostles, who had no doubt given them whole counsel of God. "Go back now," Christ tells them, "and check out what you have received and heard. Hold firmly onto what you originally learned."

Today, we can check out the whole counsel of God much more readily than the early churches. We have the completed Bible, the entire written Word of God. And we, too, must remember what we have learned from the Scriptures, holding fast to every truth and obeying every command.

Thief in the night. To those who "shalt not watch" – that is, those who fail to warn the unsaved of the coming wrath of God – Christ warns, "I will come on thee as a thief..." Whenever Jesus talks about His coming as a thief, He inevitably refers to His return on Judgment Day. In retrospect, we know that for the church in Sardis, that day would be at least 1,900 years away. How, then, could Christ say that He would come to them as a thief? As we learned from our last study, the answer is that for every person, the moment of death is tantamount to the time of Christ's return.

God obviously is not suggesting in any way that He would rob anyone as a thief. The point He wants to put across is this: If a person knows that there is a thief in his neighborhood and that he might be robbed in the night, he would lock his doors and windows and take other precautionary measures. In other words, he will be prepared for such a contingency. Similarly, God wants us to be prepared for His return.

Thus, we read in Luke 12:37,38: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants." In other words, all those who are saved, who are ready for the Lord's return, will receive the completion of their salvation on the Last Day, and will fellowship with God forever.

Not thief to all. Jesus continues: "And this know, that if the Goodman [meaning, the owner] of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (vv. 39,40).

Here, God is reminding us that no one really knows the precise time when he is going to die. If we are not ready to face our Maker and answer for our sins, then death for us will be like a thief in the night. Wonderfully, believers will not be caught unprepared. "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day" (I Thess. 5:4,5).

3:4. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Here, God commends believers elsewhere in the city who not part of this church for not having defiled their garments. They are still wearing the pure robe of Christ's righteousness. Whenever we call ourselves a child of God, we effectively are saying that we have on the robe of Christ's righteousness. But if we undermine the Bible or disobey God's commands in our life-styles, then we are defiling that garment.

But those who have not defiled the holy garments, Christ assures us here, "shall walk with me in white". White, as we learned when we studied Revelation 1, signifies purity, the absolute holiness of God Himself. And to be in white is to be eternally in the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the intimacy God expresses in saying that we will walk with Him. Back in the Garden

of Eden, Adam and Eve walked with God. They were in His presence. They lost that privilege when they rebelled against God. Now, we believers have been graciously given the pure garment of Christ. We will walk eternally in the presence of God.

The worthy. The closing phrase of this verse says "for they are worthy". We know, of course, that no believer is worthy to walk intimately with the Holy God on his own merit. Even our very best works are tainted by sin. So, this statement underscores just how gracious and condescending our Lord Jesus Christ is.

Later on, when we get to Revelation 5, we will read a beautiful song of praise. Verse 12 there describes a scene in which all those in heaven are saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

The Lamb, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. Because of the work He did at the Cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God, He alone is worthy. Those who are in Christ are considered worthy only because, by God's grace, Christ's worthiness has been counted for them.

3:5. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

Similarly, only because our Lord's victory and righteousness have been graciously counted to us that we believers shall "overcome", that is, shall be victorious, and shall be clothed in the white raiment of Christ's righteousness.

The next statement – "and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life" – has caused much concern among many Christians and has resulted in some grossly erroneous doctrines. It seems to suggest that we could lose our salvation. That, of course, is not possible. Too many passages in the Bible emphasize that once we are saved, we are always saved.

The confusion disappears, however, once we understand that in the Bible, God speaks of the book of life in two ways: one from the vantage point of creation, and the other from the vantage point of redemption.

Creation view. From the creation vantage point, God loves all men. He loves His creation, which was "very good" when it was created. And this is what God has in mind when He says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world [the *kosmos* that He created], that he gave his only begotten Son..."

But God is holy. He cannot possibly love sin and sinners. True, Christ came to save sinners; but only those whom God had chosen from before the foundation of the earth to be saved and whose sins have been washed by the blood of Christ. Thus, we read in Psalm 11:5, "The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth."

Reiterating that point, God says in Psalm 69:23-25, "Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents."

Blotted out. In that same context, He then declares in verse 28, "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous." The picture here is that when God created our first parents Adam and Eve, the names of all human beings were listed in the book of life. But as mankind has since turned sinful, they no longer qualify to be in the book of life. Hence, unless they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, their names will have to be blotted out.

That is what God is talking about here in Revelation 3:5. By promising, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life," He is saying that the names of the remnant chosen by grace will

remain in the book of life, the book that is looked at from a creation standpoint.

But God also speaks about the book of life from the redemption vantage point. With Jesus being the Lamb that made our redemption possible, that book is called the Lamb's book of life. It has in it only names of those whom God elected to be saved. Later on, we will find in Revelation 17:8 that God speaks of the unsaved as those whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

Confession. Verse 5 ends with: "But I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Jesus has earlier alluded to this in Matthew 10:32, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." What does confessing before the Father mean? The answer can be found in I John 2:1: "And if any man [any believer] sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

The Lord is pictured there as an attorney declaring to God the Father that all those for whom He died on the Cross can no longer come under the wrath of God. The penalty of their sins has been fully paid. Effectively, God is indicating that once we have become saved, the whole Godhead knows that we never can come into condemnation.

The angels. What do angels have to do with our salvation? For one thing, we learn from Hebrews 1:14 that they are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." God utilizes the angels in connection with His salvation program. We can't see angels and we don't know how they are involved. But we know that they are used by God in a definite way in our salvation.

We also read in Luke 15:10, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." It sounds as though the angels are closely watching the whole salvation program in action. And when one becomes saved, there is joy among them.

Moreover, talking about our salvation plan, God says in Ephesians 3:10,11: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The principalities and powers identify with all the angelic hosts, whoever they are. As God's pre-ordained salvation program is carried out by the church, they can see the manifold wisdom of God in action, and rejoice.

3:6. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The closing verse of this message is the same as that of the previous four messages. It reminds us that what God has to say here is to be heeded by all those who have been given spiritual ears to hear. And that means all believers.

3:7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.

God begins by identifying Himself as "He that is holy." The word "holy", in its broadest sense, means to be set apart for the service of God. In the Old Testament, for instance, the vessels in the temple, as well as the Levites, were holy because they were set apart for the service of God. But when it refers to Christ, the word is to be understood in its most exquisite, comprehensive and pristine sense. Jesus is absolutely holy.

Christ is also "He that is true." Truth is something man is always searching for. Scientists, for example, study the stars of the heavens and fossils in the rocks in a constant effort to determine where we came from. And

philosophers throughout the ages have kept trying to figure out what life is all about. But because man is a finite creature and his thoughts are tainted by sin, he can never come to truth on his own.

Jesus is the omniscient God. He is true; He is the truth. And through the Bible, He reveals those truths that He wants us to know. The most important truth, of course, is that we are sinners under the wrath of God, and that only in the Savior Jesus Christ can we escape spending eternity in hell.

But the Word of God also gives us all kinds of other important facts. We learn from the Bible, for example, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; that there was a world-wide flood in Noah's day (which explains how fossils came about); and that sin is the reason why there is so much suffering in this world.

Because Jesus is truth, we can, and indeed we must, trust His Word with all of our hearts. We may not understand everything we read in the Bible, but we accept it all by faith.

Isaiah 22. By introducing Himself as having the key of David, Christ ties us back to Isaiah 22. Speaking of a man called Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, God says in verse 21, "And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah." At once, we can see that this historical person was a figure of Christ. Remember Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful... The everlasting Father"?

God is the Father to all those who have been born from above and who, as a result, have become the inhabitants of spiritual Jerusalem. And because we are in Christ and Christ is of the tribe of Judah, we are also the house of Judah. Actually, Eliakim means "God who rises"; and Hilkiah, "a portion of God". Thus, his name effectively means the God who is risen from the dead and who is given as a portion of God.

House of David. Then, we read in verse 22, "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." See how similar this is to Revelation 3:7?

Who is the house of David? Strictly speaking, the blood descendants of King David. But the David in this context represents the Lord Jesus Christ. Referring to the Messiah, for instance, Jeremiah says, "But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them" (30:9). So, the house of David are the believers.

Putting aside the second half of Isaiah 22:22 for now, we read in verse 23, "And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house." God is prophesying here that this Christ would be fastened like a nail in a certain place, and He would be a glorious throne to His father's house after His resurrection and ascension.

Total dependence. Verse 24: "And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons." The offspring and the issue of Christ are the seed of Christ, those who believe in Him. So are the different vessels spoken of here. Like the vessels in the temple, we are set aside for the service of God. This verse thus teaches that as believers, we hang our everything on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 25: "In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the LORD hath spoken it." Is this verse suggesting that we who have placed our trust in Christ may still be cut

down? No, it is saying that Christ was cut off on our behalf. Because He was cut off, the burden – the iniquity of us all – that God had laid upon Him has also been cut off.

This whole passage in Isaiah 22, which starts out with Jesus Christ being given the key of the house of David, is thus talking about Him being our Savior.

Open and shut. Now, back to the second half of Isaiah 22:22: "so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." What is it that Christ opens and shuts? He first opens up the prison house of Satan. Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail." God opens those "gates of hell" to free those whom he has come to save. He also opens the door into heaven for them to enter through.

What He opens, nobody can shut. Satan cannot keep anyone God wants to save in the dominion of darkness. Nor can anyone shut the door to heaven that God has opened for His elect. When God proceeds to save someone, no one can possibly frustrate His plan.

On the other hand, once Christ has sentenced the unsaved to hell on the Last Day, that door will be eternally shut. No one will be able to escape from it. Likewise, once the door to heaven is shut behind us, no one can force his way in or pull us out. What He shall shut, none shall open.

3:8a. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.

The open door here has at least two meanings. First, we read in John 10:9, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved". In this Revelation verse, Christ is talking in the first instance about Himself.

But the Lord has set an open door before the church in still another sense. The apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 16:8,9, "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me." Also, in Colossians 4:3, "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ." In these passages, the open door means opportunities to proclaim the gospel.

This gets back to the chief essence of our service to God: Sending forth the gospel. In Ezekiel 34, the Lord promised that He would come and seek out His lost sheep. He is doing this now through the church.

3:8b. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Though God has opened doors for us to witness, we have no strength in ourselves to save people. The power of the gospel is not in who we are or what we do. The Holy Spirit does the convicting and saving. He uses the Word of God to touch the hearts of those who are to be saved.

Nevertheless, we must do our part. We have to keep His Word – that is, we have to obey His command to send forth the gospel and confess Him before the world. The Bible says if we confess the Lord Jesus Christ before men, He will confess us before His Father which is in heaven. But if we deny Him, then He will deny us before the Father (Matt. 10:32,33).

In other words, if we are afraid to let people know that we are Christians and if we do not want to witness to others, we would in effect be denying the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can witness for our Lord in many ways. We can, for example, hand out tracts, support missionaries, share our faith with others, and finance ministries that faithfully proclaim the gospel to the world. We also witness by our day-to-day behavior, by the way we display the fruit of the Spirit, and by the way we manifest the peace and the joy of the Lord even in hard times.

3:9. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Here we have a very negative statement. It is not against the church of Philadelphia, to be sure; God has nothing but good things to say of this church. But it is negative concerning those of whom God is speaking. The two behold's underscore the importance of what He has to say.

Remember when we looked at the church of Smyrna, we read in Revelation 2:9: "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan"? We learned then that those in the congregation who come with a false gospel are of the synagogue of Satan. These people claim to be believers but are, in fact, unsaved. They bring heresy into the congregations, and from among them come false prophets. Because they have distorted the true gospel, they lie. Whether they know it or not, they are working for Satan, the father of lies.

A promise. Is God promising in the rest of this verse that there will come a time when the unsaved will be made to worship us? No, not at all. Only God is to be worshipped; only God is worthy of being worshipped. The verb translated "worship" here is from a Greek word that also means to fall down before, or to be subject to. You see, on the Last Day, all the unsaved will stand for judgment. Christ, of course, is the Judge. But we will be judging with Him. At that point and in that sense, the unsaved of the world will come under our authority.

This is a comforting promise. In the church, those of us who are faithful to the Word are frequently ridiculed or even persecuted by others who want to bend the rules and commands of God. Here, God is reassuring us that while things may look bad now, those people will come under our authority on Judgment Day. They will find out to their utter dismay that the ones they've persecuted are the ones Christ has loved.

3:10. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Like the church at Ephesus, members of this congregation are commended by Christ for their patience. They have patiently endured, just as all of us have been commanded to.

We live in a world that is an enemy of Christ. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, Ephesians 6 warns, but against the rulers of the spiritual darkness of this world. Hence, we will encounter many difficult situations. We also have to face all kinds of physical, financial and other problems. Life is not easy. But with God's strength and knowing that Christ loves us and cares for us, we can endure.

Because we endure, God promises, He will keep us from "the hour of temptation". This promise has been quoted in many, many books on eschatology as a proof text showing that the church will be raptured before the final tribulation. "You see," they would say, "God promises that He will keep us from tribulation."

Subtle substitute. To the unsuspecting reader, the argument indeed sounds convincing. The fact, though, is that all these books have subtly substituted the word "tribulation" for the word "temptation" in this verse. Actually, these two words are very different. "Tribulation" or "affliction" is from the Greek word *thlipsis*. It is never translated anywhere in the Bible as "temptation". And the word "temptation" in this verse is from the Greek *peirasmos*, which is never translated affliction or tribulation. In fact, its verb form is translated "try" later in this same verse.

So, "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try [peirazo] them that dwell upon the earth" is referring to Judgment Day. In other words, God is reiterating that believers will not come into judgment on the Last Day.

To be sure, it is God's expressed command that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). But whereas the unsaved will appear before Christ and will be found guilty on Judgment Day, believers in Christ already stood before the judgment throne of God. Why? As our sin substitute, the Lord Jesus was found guilty by Pilate and paid the penalty due us on the Cross.

3:11. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Christ could truthfully tell the church in Philadelphia almost 2,000 years ago that He would come quickly because, as we learned earlier, for all practical purposes He comes to everyone at the moment of his death.

God then tells the church of Philadelphia to hold fast to the crown of eternal life that they have. Reading this verse by itself, one might draw the conclusion that a believer can lose his salvation. That, of course, is contrary to what the Bible teaches. God is telling us here to make sure that we are truly saved.

You see, most members of a congregation consider themselves to be members of the kingdom of God. They call themselves Christians and assume that they have the crown of eternal life. But if we are not truly saved, that crown is but a figment of our self-delusion. Only those who are saved will hold fast to their crown.

3:12a. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.

To overcome is to endure. We read in Matthew 24:13, "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." This verse parallels the structure of the one above. It teaches that only a truly saved person can and will overcome and endure.

What does it mean to be a pillar in the temple? In the New Testament, God speaks of His body as a temple. We read in Ephesians 2:20,21: "And [ye] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." In a properly designed building, every single pillar constitutes an important structural member. It brings the load it carries to the foundation on which the pillar rests. Similarly, the temple of God would not be complete until all the pillars are in place. The Lord is thus saying that every Christian has an important role to play in His kingdom, and also that everyone whom He has elected to save will be saved.

And every believer will indeed be saved eternally. God will give him the strength to endure, and will hold him fast. The child of God "shall go no more out" from the temple.

3:12b. And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

Every human needs a name to distinguish him from others. But God has no such need, because He is the one and only living God. Therefore, He does not have a name like you and I have. God uses many names in the Bible, however, to reveal to us His many attributes.

In the context here, though, "the name of my God" encompasses all the attributes as well as the actual essence of God. So, to have the name of God written on us means that we are identified with everything that God is. It also means that He owns us.

Holy City. God talks about the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21, which begins with the beautiful statement, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth." Verse 2 then reads, "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Later, verse 9 declares that the bride is the wife of the Lamb. New Jerusalem, therefore, is the whole body of believers. Note that the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God. It stresses that our salvation is a gracious gift that comes entirely from God in heaven above. We contribute nothing to it.

The promise of a new name here has the same meaning as that of Revelation 2:17. There God says, "And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

3:13. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

This, of course, is the same closing as that of the last five letters. God reiterates that what He is telling this church here is for all believers.

Lesson 6 for Revelation 3:14-22 ~ "To the Church in Laodicea"⁶

3:14. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

"Amen" is originally a Hebrew word that has been transliterated into Greek and English. It means truly, most assuredly, absolutely, or trustworthy. When Jesus says, "Verily, verily I say unto you," the "verily" in that phrase is this word "amen". So, it means "Truly, truly I say unto you." He uses that expression to call an important truth to our attention. The very essence of God is truth and trustworthiness. Hence, He's the Amen.

Jesus next calls Himself "the faithful and true witness". A witness is one who gives testimony of what is the truth. The whole Bible is the witness of God. As II Peter 1:21 tells us, the Holy Spirit moved "holy men of God" to write down what God wants us to know. The Lord Jesus Christ is the faithful witness also in the sense that He is the very personification of the Gospel. In absolute faithfulness to His Father, He emptied Himself of His glory, took on a human nature, died on the cross, rose again and ascended back to heaven, providing thereby free salvation to all those who would believe on Him.

Finally, the Lord identifies Himself as the beginning of the creation of God. This does not mean, of course, that He was the first one to be created. Christ has no beginning. Rather, the word "beginning" in this verse would be more properly translated as the source of power or the ruler of the creation.

3:15,16. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

As He did in His other messages, Christ starts by emphasizing that nothing happening in any of His churches escapes His searching glance. Thus, although the church in Laodicea may appear fine to others, Christ knows its true condition, which is neither cold nor hot. Significantly, He declares that He would rather that they were one or the other.

A congregation that is hot is one that deeply loves the Lord. It diligently searches the Scriptures in order to know Him and His will better, cheerfully keeps His commandments,

patiently endures trials and tribulations, and diligently proclaims the Gospel to all nations.

A spiritually cold congregation would, of course, be the exact opposite. For that reason, it is not likely to be looked upon by others as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those in the congregation who have any spiritual sensitivity at all would readily recognize its apostasy and would look for another church home.

But the fact that this church is lukewarm is so abhorrent to the Lord Jesus that He is ready to vomit it out. Why? We get an idea of the problem in the next verse.

3:17. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

This is a proud and complacent church. They pride themselves to have been richly blessed by God presumably because the church has managed to enjoy much increase in membership and activities. This is typical of many congregations today, especially those that emphasize the so-called health and wealth gospels, those that features signs and wonders that purportedly make people feel good, and those that have changed the Sunday worship service into nothing more than an elaborate entertaining program.

The growth of these churches is the success story of our day. Because they are so well-off financially, they are looked upon by others, as well as by themselves, as being rich. Boasting an ever-growing budget, they keep adding to the programs they offer and keep building new facilities whenever they are needed. Convinced that God's blessing is synonymous with material wealth, they think that they lack nothing.

But God tells them here that they are in fact spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, and they don't even know it. The fact is, most people in their congregation are not even saved. You see, by God's standards, the unsaved, no matter how wealthy and healthy they currently are, are actually spiritually bankrupt; only believers are rich and prosperous.

This is the problem with congregations that are more concerned with increasing membership than presenting the whole counsel of God. When churches "sweeten" the gospel to make it more appealing to men, many are bound to be misled into believing that they are born-again Christians, whereas in fact they remain spiritually bankrupt.

3:18a. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich;

This is Christ's antidote for the lukewarm church. We get an insight into what God means by gold from verses 6 and 7 of I Peter 1: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The gold that God tells this lukewarm church to get is faith in the midst of trials – an implicit trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. God reiterates this truth in Zechariah 13, where He typifies those who are to become saved under the fraction one-third. He says of them in verse 9, "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God."

You see, to strengthen their faith and to conform them into the image of Christ, God refines all of His chosen with trials and tribulations. When a congregation has faith enough to hang its whole existence on what the Word of God teaches,

⁶ *New Life Digest*, Second Quarter 1996.

[Original Series – Revelation 3:14-22 "To the Church in Laodicea", *NLD*, June 1988.]

instead of trying to win the praise of men, it will cease to be lukewarm.

Buying faith? But how does one buy gold, or buy faith from God? Without money and without price. Buying without money and without price is God's way of picturing salvation by grace. Isaiah 55, for instance, begins with this invitation: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David."

Wine and milk in this context is a figure of salvation. God is saying, in effect, "Why spend money and labor to buy things that have no lasting value? Why not buy something of everlasting value from me without money and without price? Just come to me with a humble and repentant heart, and listen to what I tell you."

3:18b. and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.

When we are unsaved we stand spiritually naked before God with all of our sins exposed. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they were physically naked but were not ashamed. But after they had rebelled against God, the first thing they did was to try to cover their physical nakedness; they tried to hide from God. That physical shame they felt was a picture of their spiritual shame.

To cover their spiritual nakedness, therefore, the Lord tells the church in Laodicea that they must become saved by clothing themselves with the white raiment of Christ's righteousness. They have to acknowledge deep in their hearts that they are sinners who deserve to go to hell, and that only with Christ as their Savior can their spiritual nakedness be covered.

3:18c. and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.

What is this eye-salve? Do you remember that when Jesus came on the scene He spoke of Himself as the light of the world? And remember He healed many a blind man. To a blind person, all is dark; all is black. But once his eyes are opened, he can see light, and because he can see light, he can differentiate the ugly things from the beautiful things that are around him.

Similarly, an unsaved person is so spiritually blind that he cannot see the ugly reality of his sins and horror of eternal damnation. Nor can he see the beautiful reality of Christ being his personal Savior by faith. Because the Lord Jesus is the light of the world, He is the eye-salve that the unsaved need to put on their spiritual eyes in order that they might see.

3:19. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Having threatened to spew them out of His mouth, the Lord comes now with a word of hope. This church is not beyond His mercy. For those He loves, the Lord implies here, He is about to rebuke and chasten.

That the Lord chastens only those whom He loves is discussed in Hebrews 12. Starting from the middle of verse 5, we read: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

Then, we read this reassuring statement in verse 11: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

In our individual lives, things sometimes go badly. We are overwhelmed by all kinds of troubles and problems. Well, God brings these things into our lives for many reasons, not the least of which is to humble us into realizing how helpless we really are and to increase our dependence on God.

This can be true of a congregation as well. This church in Laodicea thinks that it has everything going for it and has thus become complacent. Because God has not given up on it yet, He indicates that He will chasten them in order to bring them to repentance.

3:20. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

This is perhaps one of the most badly misunderstood verses in the Bible. The context here is that because so many in the church at Laodicea are not really saved, God holds out the possibility that salvation might yet come to some of them. But with this verse, many theologians teach that God comes with an offer of salvation to every person, but for the individual to become saved, it is up to him to make a free-will decision to invite Jesus into his heart.

This kind of teaching – that God has no control over whom He is to save – is altogether at odds with the salvation by grace that the Bible repeatedly emphasizes.

To help us better understand Revelation 3:20, let's read Ephesians 2 starting from verse 1: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

An impossibility. This passage declares that all the people who have become saved were once spiritually dead. Like the rest of mankind, they were followers of Satan. Being spiritual corpses, there was no way they could on their own invite Christ in when Christ knocked at the door of their hearts.

How, then, did they become saved? Verses 4 and 5 explain, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)." We became saved entirely out of God's mercy and grace. He quickened us, that is, He made us alive, even when we were dead in sin. That God alone is the one who does the saving is echoed in many passages, including John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Now, let's go back to Revelation 3:20, where God says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." Notice the next phrase reads, "If any man hear my voice..." Who can hear Christ's voice? Anybody with ears? No.

In every one of His messages to the seven churches, Jesus concludes with this statement: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." And as we learned when we carefully went through those verses, God is talking about a spiritual ear. So, in this verse, those who can hear His voice are those who have been given a spiritual ear by the grace of God.

Supping together. Then God indicates in verse 20 that He will sup with us and that we will sup

with Him. This is typified by the Lord's Supper where Jesus sat down with His disciples and He broke the bread and said, "Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." (I Cor. 11:24). When we have become a child of God, we are in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are supping on Him; we are eating with Him. The Lord Jesus is there feeding us with His Word.

This finds its highest fulfillment when we receive our glorified bodies on the last day and come into heaven. Later on in Revelation, the Bible talks about it in Chapter 21, using the figure of the marriage feast of the bride and the Lamb.

3:21. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

We have looked at the phrase "To him that overcometh" many times in Revelation 2 and 3. We are overcomers because Christ has overcome on our behalf. We are walking in His shoes. Then it says, "...will I grant to sit with me in my throne." To understand that, let's read Ephesians 1:20,21: "[his mighty power] which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

Here, the Bible declares clearly that because of what Christ did at the cross, He has been given authority over everything, not only in this world, but in the age to come. The age to come is eternity, while this world is the world we are in. So, right now Christ is reigning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Don't be misled by those who say that Christ will yet set up an earthly kingdom and reign for a thousand years in Jerusalem or some place else on earth.

Co-rulers. But will believers really be sitting in Christ's throne? Yes, indeed. This is confirmed by Ephesians 2. Earlier, we looked at the first five verses. Now, notice verse 6: "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." God not only saves the elect, but He makes them to sit with Him in the heavenlies.

Where is Christ seated? At the right hand of God. When we become saved, therefore, we are also seated at the right hand of God. To be seated, remember in the Bible, is a figure to indicate that we reign. Our throne is at the right hand of God.

True, physically, we are still down here on this earth. That is because God has commissioned us to represent Christ as His ambassadors on this earth. Our job, therefore, is to send forth the gospel to all nations and let the world see God working in us through our life-style. We reign in the sense that, together with the Holy Spirit, we can plunder Satan's house and bring the lost sheep of Christ back to their home in the kingdom of God.

3:22. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The last verse of Revelation 3 is the same verse that has been repeated now for the seventh time. God is stressing the fact that all the instructions He has given to this church are for every congregation and every believer throughout time to hear and heed.

Revelation 4

Lesson 7 for Revelation 4:1-11 ~ "The Heavenly Throne"

4:1. After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.

This verse indicates that a door has to be opened for anyone to go into heaven. That door is Jesus Christ. "I am the door," He says in John 10:9, "by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." We are saved at the moment we enter through Christ into heaven by faith.

John then describes that the voice that he hears "was as it were of a trumpet talking with me". We learned back in Revelation 1:10 that the great voice of a trumpet is that of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He comes on the clouds of glory on the last day, that sound of the trumpet will be His great call for all those who are in the grave to come forth.

Christ then tells the apostle John that He will show him things that must unfold in the future. You see, in Chapters 2 and 3, God has talked about conditions in churches throughout the New Testament period, including the time when John was receiving those messages. But now, He is about to show John His future plan for the world.

4:2. And immediately I was in the spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

In the spirit, John receives a very descriptive vision of a beautiful throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. The vision shows that God reigns in heaven. The one who sits on the throne is the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that because in I Timothy 6:15 the apostle Paul, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that Christ "is the blessed and only Potentate [Ruler], the King of kings, and Lord of lords."

To sit on the throne means to rule. It means that God rules over everything. He rules over this earth and the heavens. Though He allows Satan certain privileges, God ultimately rules. Nothing happens outside of His will.

This gives us believers real security. When we put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are hanging our life on the Almighty God, who can and will make whatever He has planned for our lives come to pass.

The rapture? Incidentally, there are those who teach that the first two verses of Revelation 4 are talking about the rapture of John, which, in turn, is a picture of the rapture of all believers. The rationale is that – in contrast to Chapters 2 and 3, which pertain entirely to the church – the remainder of Revelation does not contain the word "church" at all. They also say that inasmuch as most of the verses dealing with the final tribulation appear after Chapter 3, the church, having already been raptured, will not go through that period. This doctrine is very widely taught in churches today and, because the idea of not having to go through the horrible final tribulation sounds appealing, it is also popularly embraced by many, if not most, Christians.

That believers will be raptured before the final tribulation, however, is based on just a few selected verses taken out of context. It cannot possibly stand the scrutiny of all Scriptures. As seekers of truth, we must not accept any doctrine that is not in harmony with the teaching of the whole Bible.

Last day. In John Chapter 6, for instance, God makes it abundantly clear that it is on the last day that Christ will raise up all those who have died in Him. He declares this truth in that chapter as many as four times – in verses 39, 40, 44 and 54. "The last day" means, of course, literally the very last day of this earth's existence.

We know from John 12:48, moreover, that the world will be judged also on the last day. Jesus says, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him [the unbeliever] in the last day." Since the unsaved will have to be raised to be judged, their resurrection will also be on the last day. Hence, believers and unbelievers will be raised simultaneously.

This is exactly what both John 5:28,29 and Daniel 12:2 declare. The time will come when all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth, some to the resurrection of judgment and everlasting shame, and some to the resurrection of everlasting life. In short, there'll be one resurrection but two destinations.

Arbitrary. To decide that the final tribulation does not apply to the church just because the word "church" does not appear after Revelation 3 is arbitrary. If that principle were biblical, then the all-important statement that Jesus made to Nicodemus – "Ye must be born again" – would also have nothing to do with the church, since the word "church" does not appear once in the entire Gospel of John. For that matter, neither does the word "church" appear in I and II John, I and II Peter and Titus. Yet, I believe all theologians agree that those books are definitely addressed to the church.

Actually, God repeatedly speaks of the church in Revelation, but, as He does with almost all statements in that book, He uses figures of speech. He speaks of it, for example, as a great multitude of the redeemed from every nation (7:9), the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks (11:4), those who refused to worship the image (13:15), those in whose mouth no guile is found (14:5), those whose names are written in the Book of Life (20:15), and many, many more.

In the spirit. Revelation 4:1,2 really has nothing to do with the rapture of believers. First of all, John went up alone; no other believers went with him.

Secondly, he went into heaven. In contrast, at the time of the rapture, I Thessalonians 4 says, Jesus shall "descend from heaven" with a shout and both dead and alive believers will meet Him in the air and will ever be with the Lord. True, one can argue that heaven is wherever Christ is. But John was not then with the Lord forever. After he had received the vision, he was back on earth again.

Finally, when the apostle Paul talked about his having been caught up to the third heaven in II Corinthians 12, he confessed that he did not know whether he was in the body or out of the body. But here, John makes it clear that he was "in the spirit". In other words, he was not caught up in the body.

4:3. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

He that sat on the throne was like a jasper and a sardine stone. The sardine stone, I believe, is like today's ruby. I am not sure what jasper would be equivalent to in our day. But both are obviously very precious and are used here by God as token figures of His magnificent glory.

Moreover, these are two of the stones that appeared in the ephod that was on the breastplate that the Old Testament priests wore. On that breastplate were twelve stones signifying the twelve tribes of Israel. They were a beautiful picture of the glory of ancient Israel,

which, in turn, typified the glorious Israel of God that we are.

Why is there a rainbow round about the throne? Let's look at the only other place in the Bible, Genesis 9, where God focuses our eyes on a rainbow. This is the context: Mankind had become so wicked that God decided to wipe out the entire world with a devastating flood, saving only Noah and his family and the animals in the ark. Immediately after the flood, God blessed Noah and his sons.

The promise. Then, in verses 8 to 17, we read:

God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

Everlasting. At first glance, the rainbow seems to be just a token of God's promise that He will never destroy this earth again with a flood. But verse 16 says that the covenant is everlasting, suggesting thereby that the extent of the covenant is more than the apparent promise.

Actually, this Hebrew word for "covenant" also means "testament" or "will". You see, God has made a will in which He made certain commitments concerning the world and the human race. Among other places, we read about it in Genesis 17 and in Hebrews 8, which in turn quotes the covenant promised in Jeremiah 31.

God made this will before the foundation of the earth. In it He named all who were to be the inheritors of the grace of God. The beneficiaries include Jesus Christ, as well as all those who are to be saved. Therefore, the Bible calls believers joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. Of this will or testament, we read in Hebrews 9:17 that it is in force only when the one who made it has died. Hence, our salvation is dependent on the death of Christ.

The creation. Besides providing salvation to His elect, God also committed Himself in that covenant to create a new heaven and a new earth to replace the current ones, which will be destroyed by fire. In Romans 8, God talks about the whole creation groaning in pain, waiting to be released from the bondage of decay. That's why John 3:16 says that "God so loved the world [that is, the *kosmos*, the creation] that He gave His only begotten son."

In the promise made to Noah, God included "every living creature of all flesh" along with humans. Does this mean that there will be a resurrection of animals too? Not really. Unlike man, who is made in the image of God, animals

⁷ *New Life Digest*, Third Quarter 1996. [Original Series – Revelation 4:1-5 "Vision of the Heavenly Throne", *NLD*, July-August 1988; Revelation 4:6-11 "The Four Living Creatures", *NLD*, September 1988.]

do not have an eternal soul. And God declares in I Corinthians 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

But the Bible uses animals to represent the creation itself, since they are the highest form of the creation outside of man. So, God speaks of His promise to recreate this universe by talking about His covenant with the animals. This kind of figurative language appears in many places in the Bible.

A commitment. Because of this covenant, the rainbow God set in the clouds has far greater significance than just promising not to flood the world again. Reason: to carry out His commitment to save all His chosen people who are scattered throughout time, God has obligated Himself not to wipe the world out every time mankind becomes wicked the way He did in Noah's day. He is allowing this world to continue in its sinful way until all the elect are saved. After that will come the end of time.

This same promise has been stated by Christ Himself on several occasions in a somewhat different way. In Matthew 24:34, for instance, He says, "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." In other words, this generation of evil mankind will not be wiped out, but be allowed to exist on earth until He has carried out in full His entire plan for this world.

But why, then, did God flood the world in Noah's day? He did it as a dramatic proof that He means what He says. We learn from I Peter 3 that God the Holy Spirit had warned through Noah that He would destroy mankind for their disobedience. The fact that He did carry out that threat is to impress upon the world that when God says that someday He will destroy this world by fire and cast all the unsaved into hell, He means it.

Revelation 4:3 goes on to say that the rainbow that John sees is round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. Again God uses the picture of a precious stone to underscore the glorious character of God's grace.

4:4. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

In the Bible, and especially in the Book of Revelation, God often uses the number twelve to signify the fullness of whatever He has in view. In Revelation 7, for instance, we will read about the 144,000, comprising 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. And we will discover that it is a picture of the fullness of all believers, which, of course, number far larger than a literal 144,000.

When we get to Revelation 21, we will see the bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem, being a city 12,000 stadia long, 12,000 stadia wide and 12,000 stadia tall. It has 12 gates and 12 foundations. It has a wall 144 cubits, that is 12 times 12 again. We are going to find that all of these 12s signify the fullness of all believers.

Here in Revelation 4, God talks about 24 elders, or 12 plus 12 elders. These elders represent the fullness of all believers in heaven. The Bible teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Hence, the 24 elders are in the presence of God.

All believers. Earlier in verse 2, we saw that the Lord was sitting on a throne ruling over all things. And we know from Ephesians 2:6 that when we become saved, we are seated together in the heavenlies in Christ. Because we are seated with Christ, these 24 elders are sitting round the throne. The crowns of gold on their head mean that they are reigning with Christ.

Instead of just 12 elders, I believe God uses the number of 24 here to represent the fullness of both Old Testament and New Testament believers. Note that they are clothed in white raiment. As we have learned earlier in our study

of Revelation, the color white signifies the purity, the holiness of salvation. Remember Isaiah 1:18? "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" The raiment signifies the robe of Christ's righteousness with which we are covered.

4:5. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

The Bible often speaks of God in terms of lightning and thunderings. For example, in Ezekiel 1:13,14 we read: "As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps: it went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning. And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning."

This passage identifies lightning with God. In Job 37:2-5, both thunder and lightning represent the voice of God: "Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth: he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he will not stay them when his voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend."

We also read in Zechariah 9:14-17, where God, talking about His upcoming salvation program, says that He shall go forth as the lightning: "And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south ... And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land. For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!"

From east to west. Remember we read in Matthew 24:27 that when Christ comes on the clouds of glory, He will come as the lightning that shines from east to west? That Christ will return as lightning that shines from east to west is to underscore that He is eternal God. He is omnipresent; He is not finite. He will come as the Judge to judge the nations, as well as the Savior to complete the salvation of those who have been saved.

Tying all this together, we see here in Revelation 4:5 that God rules from His throne as the King of kings and Lord of lords. From heaven He upholds this world by His power. He sends His judgments as well as His grace. He proclaims His Word, which is a two-edged sword that saves believers and judges those who refuse to believe.

Seven lamps. In the last half of verse 5 we read, "and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Back in Revelation 1:4, we learned that the seven spirits represent the perfection of the Spirit of God, who sees the heart of man and who goes forth to evangelize the world. But why does it say here that the seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are also the seven Spirits of God?

That's because the Holy Spirit, while He saves God's elect by applying the gospel to their hearts, is also the One who convicts the unsaved of the world. Calling Him the Comforter, Jesus told the disciples just before He went to the cross: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:7-11).

4:6. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne,

and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

The "sea of glass like unto crystal" is a reference to something in the Old Testament temple. In that temple, Solomon "made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof" (II Chron. 4:2). That huge vessel, measuring some 15 feet across and 7 feet deep, "was for the priests to wash in" (v. 6).

The priests serving in the Old Testament temple were a representation of all believers. And their washing in that vessel was a figure of our being cleansed by the blood of Christ. Therefore, the sea of glass before the throne is there to remind us that we have been redeemed by God.

In our *King James Bible*, the word "beasts" in this passage is an unfortunate translation. It would be better – and perfectly proper and biblical – to translate the Greek word there as "living creatures".

All-seeing God. These living creatures have eyes before and behind. Whenever the Bible talks about many eyes, or eyes all around, it almost always refers to God Himself. Revelation 5:6, for instance, states that the Lamb had seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

In Ezekiel 1, God also speaks of four living creatures. Beside each of those living creatures, it says in verse 15, was a wheel. And of those wheels, we read in verses 18-20: "As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels."

That language clearly shows that the four living creatures are not some unknown heavenly being, but a representation of God Himself. It highlights the fact that our God is all-seeing; His sight penetrates the very heart of man.

Incidentally, whenever God uses the number four symbolically, it signifies universality. God is everywhere present.

4:7. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

This verse gives added evidence that the four living creatures are a representation of God, particularly as He comes in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first living creature was like a lion, and the Lord Jesus Christ, of course, is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David", who alone, as we will read in Revelation 5:5, is worthy to open the seven seals.

The second living creature was like a calf. In the Old Testament, a calf, as well as a lamb, an oxen or a turtledove, could be offered as a sacrifice. And the Lord Jesus was the once-for-all perfect sacrifice. The figure of the calf, a working animal, stresses the fact that Christ "took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7).

The third living creature had the face of a man. This refers to the Lord's having condescended to become a man in order to die for our sins. Had He not done so, He could not be our Savior.

The last living creature was like a flying eagle. In this context, the eagle represents the love of God. A picture of this love is described in Deuteronomy 32:11: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

Visions of God. Actually, Ezekiel 1 makes it quite clear that the four living creatures represent God. The opening verse declares that

what is to follow in that chapter is “visions of God” that the prophet saw. Verse 26 then speaks of God sitting on His throne: “Above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.”

Finally, the closing verse of that chapter declares: “As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” The bow in the clouds underscores that God is the covenant God because, as we saw earlier, rainbow is a picture of the covenant of grace.

Sparkling feet. Describing those four living creatures, Ezekiel 1:5-11 states:

Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.

And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.

Notice that their feet “sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.” In Revelation 1:15, you may recall, it says this of Christ: “And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” As we learned then, it’s a reminder that Christ endured hell fire for our sins.

4:8. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

This verse says that each of the four beasts has six wings, whereas Ezekiel 1 describes the four living creatures as having four wings each. Is the Bible contradicting itself? Not at all. Remember, these are simply word pictures of God, not how He actually looks. God is not four living creatures. The Bible often uses different word pictures, as well as different names for God, to reveal to us the different characters of the glory of God.

Here in Revelation 4:8, God is tying us back to the time when Isaiah was commissioned by God in a vision to be a prophet. Verse 1 of Isaiah 6 reads, “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.”

See how the language here parallels that of both Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4? They all speak of God sitting on His throne. Now, beginning with verse 2: “Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”

Seraphims. Here, God is talking about “seraphims”. Note that they are very similar to the four living creatures of Revelation 4. They all have six wings each; and they are all praising God. The seraphims say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts,” while the living creatures in Revelation 4 say, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” The words are slightly different, but the praise is essentially the same.

But what is a seraphim? Some kind of a super angelic being? Most commentators think so. But that cannot be. Isaiah 6:2 says that the seraphims are standing above the throne. Under no circumstance could these seraphims be any kind of being other than God Himself. No one can stand above God.

Covered face. Notice further what the six wings of these seraphims are used for. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he did fly. Back in Exodus, God had to hide Moses in the cleft of the rock so that when He passed by, Moses saw just the edge of the backside of God’s glory. You see, no one on earth can look full into the face of God and live. Here, Isaiah sees a representation of God in these seraphims. And to keep Isaiah from being consumed by the glory of God, the face of the seraphims is covered by two wings.

And the covering of the feet? In the Bible, feet that are uncovered, like bodies that are naked, are a figure of spiritual nakedness, or sinfulness. By the same token, the fact that the seraphims’ feet are covered by two wings indicates that there is no naked spot on God; He is absolutely sinless.

Omnipresent. With two of the wings he did fly. This means God is everywhere present. Remember Isaiah 6:5? When the prophet saw the seraphims, he cried out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Notice Isaiah identifies the seraphims as the King, the Lord of hosts.

And then we read this account in the following two verses: “Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”

That altar, as well as the seraphims, represents the Lord Jesus Christ. All this is a picture of God providing for our salvation Himself. He died for our sins and He also brings the gospel to us. Even as God brought that coal from the altar and touched the lips of Isaiah to make him clean, God the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to our heart to make us holy.

Same truth. Whereas the seraphims in Isaiah 6 had two wings to cover the face and two wings to cover the feet, Ezekiel 1:11, speaking of the living creatures, says, “And their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.” Again, though the language is different, the principle remains the same; God’s body is covered. We cannot come into the holy presence of the holy God without being consumed.

The picture presented by Isaiah 6 – that God Himself brings us salvation – is also seen in Ezekiel 1. We read in verse 24 of Ezekiel 1: “And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings.”

You see, whenever we share the Word of God, it is God speaking through us. The voice of God is like the noise of great waters and that of an host (both meaning a large number of people). It is God’s plan to speak through all believers. As we send forth the gospel, He does the saving.

Self adoration. The four living creatures are saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” Is God praising God Himself? Yes, indeed. First of all, Jesus is the Word and so is the Bible. As we read the Bible, the Psalms, for instance, we read songs of praise over and over again. In fact, the foremost theme of the Word of God is the glory of God.

That God glorifies God Himself is also dramatically shown in John 17. In verse 4, Jesus prays, “I have glorified thee on the earth...” Note that Jesus Christ, who is God, has glorified God the Father. Then He continues in verse 5, “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.” Here, He asks God the Father to glorify Him, God the Son.

Worthy is He. We are unaccustomed to this kind of self-praising. That’s because we humans cannot glorify ourselves; there is nothing that we can boast about in ourselves. But God is perfect. He is worthy of praise. When Christ said that He has glorified the Father and asked the Father to glorify Him, He was not engaging in an act of idle boasting. It is the kind of perfect glorification that properly goes on within the Godhead.

So, in both Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1, God is giving us word pictures showing the glory of God. Without rest, therefore, these four living creatures say, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” The last part again emphasizes that Christ is from everlasting to everlasting.

4:9. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

Just as God glorifies God, God also gives thanks to God. If I were to go around giving thanks to myself for who I am or what I have done, I would be a first-class egomaniac. It would be dreadfully sinful. But for God to give thanks to God Himself is a different matter. Under God’s divine plan, the Lord Jesus Christ had to empty Himself of His glory to become flesh and, bearing our sins, to endure the awful wrath of God as our substitute. In total obedience and righteousness, Christ did precisely that.

By doing so, the Lord Jesus has glorified God the Father. Now, as the everlasting Lamb of God sitting on the throne, He is being thanked by God for His perfect obedience and righteousness. It is the answer to Christ’s prayer in John 17 that the Father would glorify Him with the glory He had before the world was.

4:10. The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

As you’ll recall, the four and twenty elders represent all believers, Old Testament and New Testament believers together. We fall down and worship the eternal God. And we cast our crowns before the throne. These are the crown of eternal life, the crown of kingship as we reign with Christ, and whatever other crowns God graciously gives us. We lay them down at the feet of Jesus because we really do not deserve them. We have received them as a gift only because Christ was victorious over death and because He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It says here that the four and twenty elders worship Him that liveth for ever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne. Our casting of the crowns before the throne of Christ is a continuous event. We don’t literally cast the crowns down over and over again, of course. It is a figure to show that we live out our lives ever recognizing that whatever righteousness we have has been imputed to us from the Lord Jesus Christ.

4:11. Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

When we get to Revelation 5, we’ll develop more fully the word “worthy” as it applies to the Lord Jesus. But in this verse, God is being praised for having created all things. He created the heavens and the earth, of course. But He is

still creating. He creates as every human comes into existence, as every animal is born, and as every seed germinates.

There is another wonderful aspect in which God creates. He creates a new life in the heart of every believer. He makes us a new creation and gives us eternal life. I believe Revelation 4 has this spiritual aspect particularly in view. Repeatedly, this chapter points to the work of Lord Jesus at the cross.

For His pleasure. We read here that "for thy pleasure they are and were created." Believers, we know, are created and saved for God's pleasure. We read in Ephesians 1 that He "hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world...according to the good pleasure of his will."

But this verse says here that all things were created by God and for His pleasure. That would include the people who are not among the chosen. Never having become saved, they will all be condemned to hell on Judgment Day. Are they created for His pleasure also? Yes, the Bible declares.

To be sure, God says in Ezekiel 33:11 that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. And Jesus wept when He saw that Jerusalem would not respond to the gospel. But these must be viewed from the standpoint that God loves His creation. He is grieved by the fact that mankind in general and Israel in particular have rebelled against Him.

But looking objectively at the whole creation and salvation program of God, we can see that everything that unfolds is decidedly in full accordance with the good pleasure of God. If God wanted to save every human being, He could surely have done so. He is sovereign. But somehow, it is His good purpose and pleasure to provide salvation to just a remnant chosen by grace.

Power and mercy. That it is indeed pleasing to God that He judges the unsaved can be seen in Psalm 76:10: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee." The wrath of man refers to the unsaved man who is in rebellion against God. It shall praise God, and we wonder why. In Romans 9, God gives us some helpful insight into this question. Verse 22 reads, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." From that, we can infer that God plans to pour out His wrath upon the unsaved to make known His power. Of course, His justice and holiness will also be manifested.

In verse 23, the rhetorical question continues, "and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." You see, if everyone were saved, we, the remnant chosen by grace, would never know the riches of God's love, God's mercy, God's grace, and God's Supreme Sacrifice in giving of His only begotten Son to die for our sins.

But through the creation and limited salvation plan, all the wonderful attributes of God will come into full and startling view not only before us, but before the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, whoever they may be. Surely, all things are and were indeed created for the pleasure of our Holy God.

Revelation 5

*Lesson 8 for Revelation 5:1-14 ~ "The Lamb that Was Slain"*⁸

5:1. And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

The term "right hand" in the Bible often signifies one's will. So, when we learn from Ephesians 1:20 that Christ has been sitting at the right hand of God since He ascended back to heaven, we know that He has been ruling from heaven, carrying out the will of God. It says here that the book the Apostle John sees is in the right hand of Him that sits on the throne. That book must therefore associate closely with the will of the victorious Christ.

What book could that be? It is God's salvation plan. That it is written within and on the backside indicates that the plan is absolutely comprehensive; it is complete in every detail. Nothing is to be added nor is any modification needed.

Even before the foundation of the world, God chose all those whom He would adopt as His children to inherit the eternal Kingdom of God. He wrote the name of every one of them in the Book of Life and spelled out exactly when and how each of them would be saved.

The book that John sees is sealed with seven seals. It is so perfectly sealed that only the person who is uniquely qualified may open those seals and carry out that salvation plan.

The seven seals also serve as a guarantee from God that He will surely save every one that He has named in the Book of Life. Not until the last of the elect has received salvation will He return to judge and destroy this sin-cursed world.

5:2. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

Here again, the word "angel" should have been translated "messenger" (both are from the same Greek word) because the person John saw in the vision was Jesus, who is not an angel. We know the verse is talking about Jesus because He is identified by the same phrase in Revelation 10:1: "And I saw another mighty [from the same Greek word as "strong"] angel [or messenger] come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire."

Only the Lord Jesus fits that description. Remember we learned in Revelation 4 that the rainbow is a picture of God's covenant of grace? And when Jesus was transfigured on the Mount of Transfiguration, His face shone like the sun? That His feet were as pillars of fire indicates that Christ would come as the judge.

So, here in Revelation 5:2, the loud voice that John hears is that of Christ Himself. He is the strong, the mighty, the chief messenger of God. And He is asking rhetorically, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"

Who is worthy? Who indeed is worthy? The human race is totally in bondage to sin and God has unannounced that the wages of sin is death. The death that God has in view is eternal damnation. While God has by His mercy and grace decided to save a remnant from this condemned race, His justice dictates that such a salvation plan be effected only by someone who is worthy to do so.

The one worthy to implement such a salvation plan must first of all be absolutely sinless. Anyone who is tainted with sin is himself under

the wrath of God and is, therefore, automatically disqualified. To be worthy, that person must also be able to endure the full wrath of God on behalf of all those who are to be saved. That's equivalent to spending eternity in hell for every single believer.

5:3. And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

Given those requirements, what this verse says is not at all surprising. There isn't a single human being who is sinless. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the Bible declares (Rom. 3:23); there is none righteous, no, not one (3:10).

Moreover, even if there were an absolutely sinless man, he could at best pay for the sins of one other individual, not all the elect. To atone for all those whom God has chosen, the Savior must be able to endure the wrath of God poured upon a multitude of people. No one except God Himself can go through that.

Not only was there no man who was worthy to open the book, no one was worthy even to look upon it. This is a holy book; this salvation plan reflects the perfect justice, the supreme mercy, and the absolute righteousness of God. How could any sinner look at it without being consumed?

5:4. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

We can well understand why the Apostle John wept much at this point. If no one could put God's salvation plan into operation, then he would remain in his sins. If no one were qualified to be the Savior, then he could not be saved; he would have no hope.

You and I would weep too. Blessed are they who mourn, Jesus says. Once convicted by the Holy Spirit, we begin to recognize our sinfulness, our spiritual emptiness. We know only too well that in ourselves there is no hope of any kind. We realize that we desperately need a Savior.

We would mourn also because we know that no human being can be our savior. Although the Bible implies that we should be our brother's keeper, the fact nevertheless is that men will not and cannot save the souls of their fellow humans.

5:5. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

Here is the good news, the gigantic promise that God gives us. We don't have to weep in our sins. Behold, the Lord Jesus Christ has prevailed; He is worthy to open the book and loose the seals. He is qualified to be our Savior.

The reference to the Lion of the tribe of Judah goes back to a prophecy God made through Jacob in Genesis 49. Verse 8 there reads: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise [Christ came forth from the tribe of Judah]: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies [Christ would impose His will upon the world and Satan]; thy father's children shall bow down before thee [all believers would worship Him]."

Now, verse 9: "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?" This is speaking of Christ being a lion who is able to get its prey, the lion who vanquishes Satan. Revelation 5:5 thus teaches that in Christ, this prophecy of Genesis 49 has been fulfilled.

Root of David. The next phrase, "the Root of David", shows that Christ has fulfilled yet another Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. This one is recorded in Isaiah 11:1,2: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his

⁸ *New Life Digest*, Fourth Quarter 1996. [Original Series – Revelation 5:1-8 "The Book with Seven Seals", *NLD*, October 1988; Revelation 5:9-14 "Worthy is the Lamb", *NLD*, November 1988.]

roots; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”

Jesse was the father of David. So, his root would also be the root of David. Hence, verse 10 reads, “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious.”

Promises fulfilled. All this alludes to Christ. This fact is reaffirmed by Isaiah 53:2, which reads, “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.” Isaiah 53 is that wonderful chapter in which God promised that the Messiah would come. Christ is the root of David, He is the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Unfortunately, there are those who teach that Isaiah 11 has to do with some future earthly kingdom that Christ will return to set up for 1,000 years. They have failed to realize that Christ is the promised root of David and that He has already been the ensign of the people for nearly 2,000 years. As the gospel goes out into all the world, Gentiles have indeed been turning to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible itself called attention to this fact. Because more and more Gentiles had begun to come into the body of Christ, God quotes in Romans 15:9-11 several Old Testament passages to prove that His many promises to save people from the Gentiles are starting to be fulfilled. Then quoting from Isaiah 11:10, He says in verse 12, “And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.”

Yes, the root of David has prevailed by going to the cross. He is worthy and qualified to open the book and to loosen its seals. God’s perfect plan of salvation will be carried out in every detail.

5:6. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

The vision John saw now gives us a closer picture of the throne; it focuses especially upon a lamb that had been slain.

Notice first where the Lamb is standing – in the midst of the throne. The throne is that which reflects the full glory of God. He stood also in the midst of the four living creatures. They, as we learned back in Chapter 4, represent God Himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Lamb is standing in the midst of the four and twenty elders as well. They are a representation of all believers.

Imagine, believers of the Lord Jesus Christ are present right there along with God in all His glory. We first saw this in Revelation 4, where the four and twenty elders were sitting round about the throne. Here again, God shows us that the elders are sharing the glory of the heavenly throne, of the four living creatures, and of the Lamb of God.

Oh, the condescending love of God! God has imputed to us His glory; He has covered us with the righteousness of Christ; He has let us share the spotlight with God in this throne setting.

The Lamb. Like the Lion of Judah and the Root of David, the Lamb here is symbolic of an Old Testament promise being fulfilled. Remember Isaiah 53, which describes so beautifully the character of the coming Messiah? Of Him, we read in verse 7, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

Thus, when John the Baptist introduced Christ in John 1:29 as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, He was effectively declaring that Jesus was the promised Messiah

that would come as a lamb to be slaughtered. He came to be killed. Now, here in Revelation 5:6, we see Christ standing there as a lamb that has been slain, but is alive.

Seven horns. The Lamb has seven horns. In the Bible, the word “horn” is used in two senses. First, it refers to a musical instrument – the ram’s horn that was blown. It’s like a trumpet. Later in Revelation, we are going to read about seven trumpets being blown and we’ll learn that they all represent the judgment of God.

In fact, back when we studied Revelation 1:10, we already learned that the sound of the trumpet is the voice of God calling forth the dead on Judgment Day. So, the “Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns” indicates that Christ, having endured the wrath of God and having overcome death, will be the one to ultimately judge the unsaved.

The word horn is used in the Bible also to denote strength or power. In Psalm 75, for example, God tells unbelievers not to be so foolish as to use their limited strength against the Almighty God, saying in verse 4, “I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn.” Oftentimes, God uses horn to signify the power of His salvation plan. He says in Psalm 132, for example, “I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed” (vv. 16,17). In other words, He’ll bring the strength and power of David to bud.

In Luke 1, Zacharias sang a song of praise when his eight-day-old son, John the Baptist, was circumcised. Speaking of Christ, he says in verse 69, “He [God] hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” Thus, the Lamb’s seven horns reflect the perfection of the power of God. Having risen from the grave, Jesus has since been given authority over everything, not only in this world, but in the ages to come.

Seven eyes and Spirits. The Lamb has seven eyes; He can see everything perfectly. He can look into the hearts of men and know how desperately we need a Savior. He is also able to seek and find every lost sheep of Israel so that all those whom God has chosen to save will ultimately become saved.

The seven Spirits, as we learned back in Revelation 1:4, represent the divine perfection of the Spirit of God. And in this throne scene, they depict in particular the Holy Spirit’s activity in evangelizing the world. He has been sent forth into all nations to convict men of their sins.

5:7. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

Having prevailed by going to the cross, the Lamb is worthy to take the book and carry out the salvation program written therein. As the right hand signifies the will, so Christ came to faithfully do the will of God, which required that He emptied Himself of His glory to come to earth and to die on the cross for our sins.

Even to Christ, the prospect of enduring the wrath of God was horrifying. Remember how agonizing Jesus was at Gethsemane? His sweat was like great drops of blood. But though He asked if the Father would take that cup from Him, He said, “nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36). The Lamb did the will of God faithfully.

5:8. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

It’s understandable that the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb; they are humbly and gratefully worshipping their Savior. But why do the four living creatures fall down too? Haven’t we learned that they are a

representation of God Himself? Why would God worship God?

To complicate matters further, we read in the next verse that these living creatures, along with the elders, sang a song of praise, thanking the Lamb for having redeemed them by His blood. Was God redeemed by God?

Harp. Before making any hasty conclusion, let’s look first at the way the elders and the living creatures worship. First of all, we see that they have harps. In the Bible, God uses the harp as a musical instrument that accompanies the singing of praises to God. In Psalm 33:2, for instance, we read: “Praise the Lord with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.”

David was a skillful harpist, as well as a good shepherd and a good king. When he played the harp, the evil spirit would leave Saul (1 Sam. 16:23). Now, David is a great type of Jesus because Christ is our shepherd, our king and the one who has freed us from the evil spirit. It’s not surprising, therefore, that the four living creatures have every one of them a harp.

Next, we see in verse 9 that the four living creatures, as well as the four and twenty elders, are singing a song of praise before God. Does God sing? Yes, indeed. On the evening of the Last Supper, remember, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn before they went to the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:26).

God sings. Moreover, we read in Zephaniah 3:17: “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” Isn’t that enlightening? God sings!

Notice why God sings: “He will joy over thee with singing.” The Lord is rejoicing over the fact that His chosen have been saved, that God has done His work of salvation. He rests in His love; that is, He is at peace in His love. In short, God sings praises because He rejoices in what the Lamb has done. That’s the very same reason why the four living creatures, which represent God Himself, are worshipping God here. The whole scene focuses on the atonement effected by the Lamb that was slain; and God rejoices over what the Lamb has done.

But why would God indicate that He was redeemed by the Lamb’s blood? That’s because Christ identifies Himself intimately with believers. Remember what He said to Saul on the road to Damascus? He asked, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”, while in fact Saul was persecuting Christians. And in Matthew 25:40, He said to the sheep on His right hand, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Prayers of saints. Revelation 5:8 goes on to say that the living creatures and the elders have golden vials (or bowls) full of odours (or incense), which are the prayers of the saints. This is a figure tying back to the temple in the Old Testament. When offerings were made to God then, there was incense burning. That incense, this verse tells us, is a picture of the prayers of the saints. When we pray, we are worshipping God in a way that is a sweet fragrance to Him.

Jesus, of course, also prays to God. The Gospels record many accounts of the Lord praying. Sometimes, He spent a whole night in prayer. Why does God pray to God? Why does God worship God? Why does God glorify God? All this interaction within the Godhead is a mystery our finite minds can never fully understand.

But the point is that God is indeed typified by these four living creatures. God does pray to God, and God does worship God, especially because Jesus was the one who made it possible for God’s magnificent salvation plan to unfold.

5:9. And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

Notice that the four living creatures, along with the four and twenty elders, are saying, "[Thou] hast redeemed us to God by thy blood". Before we go on, let's look further at this matter of God redeeming God. I noted earlier that one reason why God praises God for having redeemed God is that Christ identifies Himself intimately with every believer. He regards whatever done unto "one of the least of these my brethren" as having been done unto Him.

But God also did redeem Christ. We know that to be so from Psalm 69, among other places in the Bible. This is a messianic Psalm, as evidenced by verse 21: "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." The prophecy was fulfilled, of course, when Christ was nailed to the cross (Matt. 27:34). In that context, we read this prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ in verse 18: "Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies." You see, He was praying to God to redeem His soul.

In Psalm 16, another messianic Psalm, we read in verse 10: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Indeed, God did not leave Jesus in hell nor allow Him to see corruption. When Christ had paid for our sins, God redeemed Him.

All this explains why the four living creatures in Revelation 5:9, though they are a representation of God, are nevertheless praising God for their redemption.

A new song. "They sang a new song," it says here. What new song? One place we can find the answer is the opening verses of Psalm 40: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord."

People all over the world sing. On the radio, we can hear all kinds of music and all kinds of songs. But when we are saved, a new kind of singing bursts forth from our lips. It is singing in praise to God for the matchless, wonderful and incomprehensible salvation that He has provided. It is a song that the unsaved would never know and could never sing.

And so, they sang a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof." The "Thou" there, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ; and the book is God's salvation plan. Christ is the only one that is worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof. Why? Because "thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us by thy blood." The focal point of this praise is God as our redeemer, the Savior who shed His blood and died to bring us salvation.

All nations. By His blood, Christ has redeemed to God people out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. That's a most reassuring statement. Had Jesus come only for national Israel, you and I would not be saved, since most of us are Gentiles.

But even from before the foundation of the earth, it has always been God's plan to save a people for Himself out of every nation. God is not a respecter of persons. He promised Abraham, "This is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations" (Gen. 17:4). There is to be a remnant chosen by grace coming from every people.

Note that the people saved come out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation. The four words really mean the same thing. But God uses this language to underscore the universal

nature of His salvation program. As we have learned before, the number four, when it has a spiritual meaning, usually symbolizes universality.

5:10. And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Not only has God saved us, but He has even made us unto kings and priests, so that we shall reign on the earth! This magnificent truth can also be found in Ephesians 1. We read there that after Christ had risen from the grave, He sat down at the right hand of God and was given authority over everything, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. So, He has since been reigning as King. Ephesians 2:6 then reads, "And [God] hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

If Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God reigning as King and if we are seated with Him, then we are reigning as kings as well. We, of course, are not actually in heaven, but we are the ambassadors of the King of kings. We reign as Jesus reigns as we assault the dominion of Satan and set free those who have been enslaved by Satan. We do that when we bring the gospel. God then works through the gospel to save His people.

We also reign over our bodies. Before we were saved, Ephesians 2:3 tells us, we were subjected to the lusts of our flesh; we were fulfilling the desires of the flesh. But now, being in Christ, we have the power to crucify the flesh and its desires. Our bodies are no longer enslaved to Satan; they are now under the rule of our resurrected souls.

Priests and prophets. The Lamb has made us unto our God not only kings, but priests as well. When we go out into the world with the gospel, we are serving God also in a priestly role. By nature all humans are at enmity with God. We are helping to reconcile them with their Creator. As we pray for them, we are interceding to God on their behalf. We are acting as an intermediary, which is what priests do.

Thus, we read in 1 Peter 2:9, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people..." We are a royal priesthood; we are both kings and priests as we live out our Christian lives.

Actually, though this is not mentioned here, we have also been made prophets of God. We prophesy whenever we declare the Word of God. We thus assume a threefold office when we become saved: a priestly office, a kingly office, and a prophetic office.

Humble kings. This verse says that we shall reign on the earth. Along with Christ, we shall reign on the new earth. Actually, from the time that we are saved, we begin reigning as kings on this earth. We must keep in mind, though, that our kingship has been entirely imputed to us by the grace of God; it is nothing that we have earned. We must remember also that the character of God's kingdom on this earth is that of humility.

When Jesus was on earth 2,000 years ago, He was meek and humble in heart. Like Him, our King, we are to live out our kingly roles on earth humbly and meekly. We don't go around implying arrogantly that we are better than others. As ambassadors of Christ, we have been assigned the ministry of reconciliation. We are to love our enemies. We desire the very best for them, namely that they too might have eternal life. Our prayer is that they too might become reconciled with God.

Incidentally, the fact that believers are made kings, priests and prophets is why James 5:14 talks about our being anointed. Before we were saved, we had a sin-sick soul. But as God works through the gospel and the prayers of other

believers to save us, He anoints us with the Holy Spirit.

5:11. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

Here, God is giving us a picture of the beauty, the wonder and the majestic character of God. We see an innumerable company of angels gathered around the throne to praise Him.

A somewhat similar description of the heavenly throne can be found in Daniel 7. Verse 9 of that chapter gives us the setting: "I beheld till the thrones were cast down [that is, were set in place], and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire." "Pure wool" has to do with the lamb that was slain, so Christ as the Messiah, is again pictured as sitting on the throne. In the context of Daniel 7, though, the emphasis is on His being the judge. Hence, His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire.

Then, verse 10 reads, "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened." Here, we see the wonderful glory of God with thousand thousands ministering unto Him and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before Him.

5:12. Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Those millions of angels that are surrounding the throne are saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain..." Throughout this chapter, the chief focal point always returns to Christ as the Redeemer – the Lamb that was slain. He is worthy because He died and rose again from the dead. It was His worth.

Notice that He is worthy to receive seven different things: power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing. They represent the perfection of all that anyone is entitled to.

Christ, to start with, is worthy to receive power. He is omnipotent. He spoke and everything came into being, and by His Word all things are sustained. He is worthy to receive riches. He owns everything and He is the inheritor of the new heaven and the new earth. He is infinitely wise, and has the strength to be obedient even unto death. And honor – there is no one else that we can bow before except the Lord Jesus. Nor can anyone else be glorified as He is glorified. And so, He is worthy to receive all blessings.

5:13. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

It says here that every creature in heaven and on earth is praising the Lamb. This reminds us of Psalm 148:

Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights.

Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his host.

Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.

Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.

He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he hath made a decree which shall not

pass.

Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:

Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word:

Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars:

Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl:

Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth:

Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children:

Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.

He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD.

Savior of all. The word "LORD" in this Psalm is really "Jehovah". This is the name that God uses in the Old Testament to identify Himself as the Savior. Thus, the phrase "Praise ye the LORD" should really read "Praise ye the Savior." In other words, every part of creation is to praise Him for being such a wonderful Savior. We can understand why believers want to praise Him. But will the creation and the unsaved of this world praise Him as well?

Yes, indeed. The whole universe was originally created to the glory of God. But mankind, which was to rule over the world, rebelled against God and, as a result, God cursed man. So that imperfect man won't be ruling over a perfect world, God also cursed the creation. Romans 8:20 explains: "For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope." And verse 22, "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

But God loves His creation. The word "world" in "For God so loved the world..." is from a Greek word that, in the largest context, means the whole universe. God gave His only begotten Son not only to redeem those who would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but also the creation itself. Romans 8:21 declares, "The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

In other words, just as all those who have died in Christ will be resurrected with a perfect spiritual body, so the currently cursed creation will be destroyed and be replaced by a new heaven and new earth. We read about this in II Peter 3.

New creation. That's why Romans 8:19 says, "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." The manifestation of the sons of God occurs on the last day, when all believers are raptured and caught up to be with Christ. Then, after the unsaved have been judged, God will destroy this earth with fire and recreate a new universe to accommodate the spiritual bodies of believers.

Yes, the whole new creation will glorify Christ the Lamb. This does not mean, however, that there will literally be animals and sea creatures, as we know them. For one thing, we read in Revelation 21:1, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." If there is not going to be any sea, then there will not be any sea creatures. Moreover, I Corinthians 15:50 states, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." And that would exclude all the animals of this earth from heaven.

Why then does Revelation 5:13 say that every creature in the sea will glorify Him? And what about all those things in Psalm 148? Answer: God is speaking in parables, using this present

universe, with all its plants and animals and sea creatures and rocks, etc. as a figure to represent the creation. He is telling us that the whole creation will be redeemed, and will be praising Him for ever and ever.

Unbelievers too. What about the unbelievers who are standing for judgment? Are they going to praise the Lamb? Yes, they are; but sadly, not because Christ has become their Savior. Only while we are living on this earth can we have salvation. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). There will be no second chance.

But the unsaved will give glory to God nevertheless. We read in Philippians 2:9-11: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is highly significant that on Judgment Day, the Lamb that was slain will be the Judge. The same Lord Jesus who meekly and humbly endured the shame of eternal damnation on the cross will return with power and glory on the last day to judge the world. What a dramatic contrast that is.

Similarly, we believers are to walk very humbly and meekly on the earth; we are to endure insults and tribulations. But at judgment day, the tables will be turned. The proud of this world will be humbled and shamed and, as I Corinthians 6 says, we will be judging them with Christ.

5:14. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Remember in Revelation 3, God identifies Himself to the Laodicean church as "the Amen"? The word means truly, or absolutely. Here, God is reminding us that all that we have read about the Lamb being worthy to receive glory and honor and power and so on is absolutely true. There is no exaggeration.

We are not surprised, therefore, that the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever. Throughout eternity, all believers will be worshipping Christ. We recognize and are deeply grateful that He, the Eternal God, is our Creator and our Savior. He is worthy of our praise and worship.

Of course, we are already worshipping Him now. We worship Him by being obedient to His Word. We worship Him as we sing songs of praise to Him. We worship Him as we pray to Him, as we recognize that He is the giver of all good and perfect gifts. We worship God as we fellowship together in the congregation.

Never again. Notice that constant refrain "for ever and ever". We saw it in verse 13, "and unto the Lamb for ever and ever"; and here in verse 14, "they worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever". This is very important.

Back in Revelation 1:18, God declared, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen." The focal point of that statement is that He is alive for evermore. This means that the salvation program of which we are an integral part, of which we are the primary beneficiaries, is a once for all development or happening.

Never again throughout eternity will God put through a salvation plan under which God Himself dies to save sinners. It is done once for all; Christ is the Lamb for ever and ever. This important fact also guarantees our salvation. It means that when we live in the new heaven and the new earth, we will be with Him for ever and ever. We will never be separated from God by our sins. Nor will Christ ever need to pay for our sins again.

Revelation 6

Lesson 9 for Revelation 6:1-17 ~ "Opening the First Six Seals"

6:1. And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts [better translated living creatures] saying, Come and see.

The Lord Jesus Christ now begins to open the seals of the book. Remember, this book is God's salvation plan, and Christ is the only one who is worthy to open it. So, as each seal is opened, we should expect to see some aspect of that program. Failing to keep this in mind has caused many to make way-out speculations about the four horsemen in this chapter.

Earlier in our study of Revelation, we saw that the voice of God is typified by thunder and that the four living creatures are a representation of God Himself. Not surprisingly, therefore, this verse tells us that as the Lamb opens the first seal, John hears, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four living creatures saying, "Come and see."

Thus, this verse again focuses on the Lord Jesus. As He begins to open the seals, He tells John – and us – to come and see His perfect salvation plan.

6:2. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

Many theologians and commentary writers identify the rider of the white horse as the Antichrist. That's a most unfortunate mistake. Nowhere in the Bible is the color white associated with Satan or the Antichrist. White has to do with that which is pure, that which is holy.

Describing Christ, for instance, John writes in Revelation 1:14, "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." In Chapter 3, God told the church of Sardis in verse 5, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." In Chapter 19, in fact, where God talks about Christ coming in the clouds of glory to judge the world, verse 11 states that He is sitting upon a white horse.

Remember, the Lamb that was slain for our sins is opening the seals, and is telling us to come and see the salvation plan that He has provided for us. The first and foremost figure in that plan, therefore, should be Christ. Indeed, many Scriptures confirm that.

Psalm 45. In Hebrews 1:8, we read: "But unto the Son he saith, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.'" That passage is quoting verses 6 and 7 of Psalm 45. So, we know at least that portion of Psalm 45 is messianic.

Now, notice verses 3 to 5 of that psalm: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee."

It is prophesying here that Christ, the King, would be riding prosperously, or victoriously, with a sword girded at His side. The sword, of course, is the Word of God. His arrows would

⁹ *New Life Digest*, First Quarter 1997. [Original Series – Revelation 6:1-8 "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse", *NLD*, December 1988; Revelation 6:9-17 "The Fifth and Sixth Seals", *NLD*, January 1989.]

penetrate the heart of His enemies and the people would fall under Him.

Can you see how closely Revelation 6:2 parallels this passage? The rider of the white horse has a bow; and a bow is that which arrows are shot from. He has a crown, which means that He is the majestic king. And He went forth conquering, and to conquer; He rides prosperously with His arrows sharp in the heart of His enemies and the people falling under Him.

Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ is the one riding prosperously on the white horse. With a bow in hand, He is going forth to build His church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

6:3,4. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

The first clue we have of this rider is that the color of the horse is red. Red is a color that God has assigned to Satan in Revelation 12. We read in verse 3, "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon," and in verse 9, "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan."

Before Satan came to the scene, there was total peace on the earth. There was no warfare, no enmity anywhere in the world. Animals then were herbivorous. They did not kill one another.

But because Satan had deceived Eve, causing Adam to disobey God, peace was taken from the earth. No longer at peace with God, mankind became spiritually dead. Satan is the very essence of destruction. When Jesus says, "Don't fear him who can destroy the body," He is referring to Satan.

Enslaved. Having become enslaved to Satan, people of the world have since been engaging in all kinds of killing. They kill one another in wars; they murder each other; nowadays, they even kill unborn babies by the millions. This is the way Satan blinds mankind, he causes them to kill one another.

In his attempt to frustrate God's salvation plan, Satan particularly wants to kill God's people. Almost immediately after Pentecost, when God started to evangelize the world, Stephen was martyred. Then James was killed by the sword. Since then, Christians have been martyred in all parts of the world.

But note that both the power and the sword that Satan has were given to him by God. He cannot do anything beyond what God allows him to do.

6:5,6. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

This time, we have a black horse. Black is synonymous with darkness; it has to do with sin and judgment.

Note that John hears a voice in the midst of the four living creatures. It emphasizes that God Himself is speaking. At first glance, what He says seems hard to understand. But instead of speculating, let's search the Bible and interpret Scripture with Scripture. Keep in mind that the book that is being opened is God's salvation plan. So, this seal has to do with an aspect of that plan.

A reference to bread being given by weight appears in Ezekiel 4: "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment: That they may want bread and

water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity" (vv. 16,17). Wheat and barley are grains commonly used for bread making.

Breaking the staff of bread so that people have to eat by measure or by weight is thus a picture of God having withdrawn His blessing so much so that the people consume, or waste away, as a result. They are judged "for their iniquity," that is, because of their sins.

Leviticus 26. We find a similar reference in Leviticus 26:26, which reads, "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied." Ten women baking in one oven is a dramatic picture of the shortage of flour.

Even as Ezekiel 4 talks about breaking the staff of bread "in Jerusalem", the context of Leviticus 26 indicates that God is speaking to His people. It says earlier in verse 11, "I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people."

The famine pictured by verse 26 is but one of many consequences that God warns would happen to the Israelites "if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments" (v. 14). From verse 16 through verse 39, He repeatedly uses the phrase "seven times more" to describe the ultra severe punishment that would come upon them.

Forewarned. The harsh punishment is in line with a principle that Jesus has laid down: The servant who knows the master's will but does not obey the master will be beaten with many more stripes than the disobedient servant who does not know the master's will (Luke 12:42-48).

So, this rider on the black horse is a warning to the corporate church that we cannot play church. If a congregation is not faithful to the Bible, God will bring about a spiritual famine so that it will end up with an acute scarcity of the true gospel.

The pair of balances that the rider holds warns that the behavior of the church is constantly being weighed by God. Back in Daniel 5, there is an account of the last Babylonian king Belshazzar seeing some mysterious writing on the wall. Interpreting it, Daniel told the king, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (v. 27). Shortly thereafter, God brought judgment upon him and his empire.

Oil and wine. The last phrase in this verse is comforting for the true believer, pictured by the oil and wine. In the Bible, wine typically represents the blood of Christ; and oil, the Holy Spirit who applies the gospel to the hearts of the elect and anoints them as kings and priests of the kingdom of God.

Remember the parable of the good Samaritan? He poured oil and wine on the wounds of the man that had been beset upon by thieves and left half dead. Physically, one may say that the oil helps to soften the wounds and the wine serves to disinfect. And that may be so. But spiritually, Christ is pointing to the nature of salvation. The half-dead man is a picture of the unsaved; he was healed by the Holy Spirit and the blood of Christ.

Thus, "see thou hurt not the oil and the wine" promises that even when their churches go apostate, true believers themselves will not lose their salvation. Those whom God has saved will not be deceived by false gospels. Once saved, we are saved eternally.

6:7,8. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse; and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill

with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

The Greek word for "pale" in this verse is always translated "green" elsewhere in the Bible. We find that same word in Mark 6:39, where Jesus directed the 5,000 He miraculously fed to sit down on the green grass. It is also the same word used in Revelation 8:7, where we read that "all green grass was burnt up", and in Revelation 9:4, where the locusts were commanded not to hurt "the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree".

In all those applications, the context has to do with those who have become saved. But here in Revelation 6, it is associated with a horseman that carries Death and Hell. Apparently because of this seeming contradiction, most translations have substituted the word "pale" for the word "green".

But we must always compare Scripture with Scripture. Since "green tree" and "any green thing" are used by the Bible to represent believers, we must conclude that this fourth horse is a green horse and that its rider represents those who are saved.

Two-edged sword. How can that be? You see, we believers are commissioned to bring forth the Word of God, and the Word of God is a two-edged sword. It brings life to those who respond positively, but it also brings death and hell to those who do not respond. As John 3:18 states, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already."

When we send forth the gospel, of course, we do so with love in our hearts. But on the last day, when Jesus returns to judge the unsaved, all the believers will be there judging with Him (1 Cor. 6:2). And that will be the fulfillment of this particular statement. Death and Hell will come to those who rejected the gospel that we proclaimed.

The Old Testament confirms this in Ezekiel 14. In verses 12 and 13, God begins to talk about judgment on Israel, which is a type of the corporate church: "The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it."

Judgment. Once a church goes apostate, the first thing that comes upon it is spiritual famine – the true gospel just dries up. This, as we've just seen, is implicit in the opening of the third seal.

God then says in Ezekiel 14:14, "though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God."

Noah, Daniel and Job are three men who found grace in the eyes of the Lord and are standout illustrations of what a righteous man is. But here, God is saying that even though they were in the congregation, judgment will still come to the apostate church. Only they themselves will be saved.

Elaborating on the judgment, God goes on and warns that He would cause "noisome beasts to pass through the land" (v. 15), bring "a sword upon that land" (v. 17), and send "a pestilence into that land" (v. 19).

Close parallel. Notice how closely the fourth horseman of Revelation 6 parallels Ezekiel 14. It says, "and power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword". Remember the sword of Ezekiel? "With hunger." Remember the famine? "With death." That would be the pestilence. "And with the beasts of the earth." Remember the noisome beasts?

A similar statement can also be found in Jeremiah 15:2: "And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the Lord; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the

sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity. And I will appoint over them four kinds, saith the Lord: the sword to slay, and the dogs to tear, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the earth, to devour and destroy."

Worldwide apostasy. Note that in all these passages, God features the number four or fourth. In Revelation 6, we have the fourth seal, the fourth horseman, and power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth. In Ezekiel 14, they will be killed in four ways: with sword, with hunger, with death, and with the beasts of the earth. And in Jeremiah 15, God "will appoint over them four kinds" of judgment.

The number four in the Bible, when it has a spiritual meaning, often represents universality. The fourth seal, therefore, points especially to that period of time just before Judgment Day when churches all over the world will become apostate.

This doesn't mean that there won't be a single church left that remains faithful to the Word. But by and large, congregations all over the world will become apostate. And God will judge them by allowing them to be overrun by false prophets that come with signs and wonders.

Such an eventuality is implied in Matthew 24. Verse 15 says: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains." The time will come, God is saying there, when gospels other than the true one will dominate churches all over the world; true believers will then have to flee from them.

Signs and wonders. And verse 24, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." God also declares in II Thessalonians 2 that the man of sin will take his seat in the temple. In other words, Satan (the man of sin) will overrun the corporate church (the temple). This will be the key characteristic of the final tribulation period, which transitions into Judgment Day.

And so God is warning us that we may never presume upon Him. True, the gates of hell cannot prevail against His plan to build His church. But when the corporate church becomes apostate, He will not stay Satan's hand. In fact, when most of God's elect are saved, He will loose Satan for a season to attack the unfaithful church as a judgment.

Remember we saw in Revelation 5 that this sealed book was written on both sides? It implies that God's salvation program is complete in every detail from the very beginning right to the very end. So, as Christ opens the other seals, we can expect Him to give us information on developments leading right up to Judgment Day.

6:9. And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held.

God uses the word "soul" in the Bible sometimes to represent a person or a living being. There were eight "souls" on Noah's ark, for instance. But in the context here, they refer to the spirit essence of those believers that were slain for the Word of God. Their bodies are still in the grave.

From this verse and the next, we might draw the conclusion that when a child of God is martyred, his soul leaves the body and goes under an altar somewhere, where he is miserable, constantly crying out to God for revenge. But that would not be in accord with what the rest of the Bible teaches.

II Corinthians 5 declares, for instance, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the

Lord, which, according to Philipians 1:23, is far better. And the reason it is far better can be found in Revelation 20. Talking also about "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," verse 4 there says, "they lived [that is, they had conscious existence] and reigned with Christ."

Living and reigning with Christ is by far the very best that any soul could ever be; it is altogether different from crying miserably under an altar somewhere for revenge.

Atonement. Actually, the altar in this verse is a picture of the atonement provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, the lamb was burnt on the altar and the blood was poured down the sides of the altar. So, the phrase "under the altar" is to underscore the fact that these are the souls of believers, whose sins have been covered by the blood of Christ.

Incidentally, this verse is pointing not just to Christians who have been ruthlessly murdered. Every believer is in a sense slain by the unsaved. You see, because we follow Christ, the world hates us (John 15:19). And Jesus states in Matthew 5 that when a person hates someone, he has already committed murder in his heart. Since we are hated by the world, we have in God's eyes been murdered by the world.

6:10. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

These souls are crying out for God's justice. Does it mean that when we are reviled and persecuted by the world, we are to seek vengeance? No, not at all. In Romans 12:19 God says, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

No, while we live out our lives on earth, we are commanded to love our enemies. We are to witness to them and pray for their salvation, remembering that, but for the grace of God, we would be behaving as they are.

These souls, however, are living and reigning with Christ in heaven. Having completed their work on earth, they no longer have the duty of sending forth the Gospel. So, they are now eagerly awaiting the culmination of God's salvation plan, and that will take place only when Christ returns to judge the world.

Remember also that the souls of these believers, having departed from their sin-cursed bodies, now have completely the mind of God. They therefore earnestly desire that God's perfect justice be done. And that calls for the avenging of the blood of the saints and the eternal damnation of the unsaved.

6:11. And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

White robes, as we learned earlier, represent the righteousness of Christ. That white robes were given to every one of them is to emphasize again that these are souls of believers. These souls are told to rest yet for a little season. To rest in God is to trust God totally for our salvation. It is typified by the day of rest in the Old Testament.

In Numbers 15, there is an account of a man picking up a few sticks on the Sabbath day. Because he did work on the day of rest, God had him stoned to death. It's a dramatic picture of someone who claims to trust in Christ yet believes that he has also done something toward his salvation. Such a person is still subject to damnation because, consciously or otherwise, he refuses to give all the glory to God.

These souls under the altar are told to continue trusting fully in the Lord and to wait "until their

fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." In other words, Judgment Day won't come until all of God's elect have become saved and have therefore been hated and murdered by the world.

Wonderfully, these souls have to wait but "for a little season". It will not be a long time. The Bible says that ever since the cross, we have been living in the "last days". Hence, we are now much closer to the end of time.

6:12. And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.

Earthquake is a result of sin. This world was created perfect and man was given authority to rule over it. When man rebelled against God, God cursed this earth, as well as mankind, in order to maintain His ordained line of authority. As a result, earthquakes, along with thorns and thistles and all kinds of other bad things, entered into this creation.

Significantly, when Jesus died on the cross and again when He rose from the grave, there was also an earthquake. God uses those earthquakes to remind us that, as part of His salvation program, this earth, having been cursed, will be destroyed on the last day and be replaced by a new one.

No timekeepers. The language of this verse is quite similar to that of Matthew 24:29: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

To understand its significance, we need to go back to Genesis 1. There, the Bible tells us that God created the sun, the moon, and the stars on the fourth day "for signs, for seasons, days and years". In other words, He set them in the heavens to mark the passage of time. Both Matthew 24:29 and this verse are thus talking about the last day, when the time keepers are taken out of existence. As the universe collapses, the stars will fall from heaven.

Black sun. The language of this verse in Revelation 6 also ties back to Joel 2:31, which reads, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." We know from Acts 2:16 that Joel 2 is talking about the first coming of Christ. At the time of the cross, the sun was darkened and the moon did not shine for three hours. This emphasizes that when Christ was hanging on the cross, Judgment Day came upon Him in the full sense of the word. Having become sin for all believers, He suffered the very same wrath of God as that which will be poured out on the unsaved on the last day.

Frankly, I do not know why the sun will be black as sackcloth of hair. Sackcloth has to do with mourning. However, I have searched the Scriptures, but have not found the spiritual meaning of the phrase "sackcloth of hair".

Bloody moon. The moon in the Bible often symbolizes Satan. In Genesis 1 again, God declared that the moon was to rule over the night. Spiritually, Satan is the ruler of the night. Throughout the Scriptures, God uses the figure of darkness or night to represent sin, hell and Satan.

Sometimes, the moon also represents the law of God. In a real sense, even as the moon rules over the night, the law rules over the unsaved. Moreover, the ceremonial law was linked closely to new moons and other days in the lunar month.

Typically, blood symbolizes death and damnation. Jesus shed His blood; He was damned in our place. Thus, "the moon became as blood" points both to the ultimate death and damnation of Satan and to the death and

damnation that the law of God will demand for the unsaved on Judgment Day.

6:13. And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

How can the stars of heaven fall to the earth? Is God simply using a figure of speech? Possibly. As we have just seen, the statement in the last verse about the moon becoming as blood is symbolic.

But the prophecy given in Matthew 24 that the sun and the moon would darken on Judgment Day was literally fulfilled when Jesus hung on the cross for our sins. So, when God states that the stars will fall from heaven on the last day, He probably means it literally. Since the earth is just a tiny planet, how can it have enough gravity force to draw unto itself stars, which are typically the size of our sun? Answer: With God, all things are possible.

While He was on earth, for example, the Lord Jesus suspended the law of gravity and walked on water. In Acts 8, Philip was supernaturally transported away from the Ethiopian eunuch all of a sudden. At the end of time, God will no doubt do away with all the laws of physics. These laws were established with the creation to begin with.

Untimely figs. Figs in the Bible have to do with spiritual fruit, especially from the nation of Israel. So, by "a fig tree casting her untimely figs", God is saying that even toward the end of time, national Israel will not bring forth timely fruit. As a nation, it persists in unbelief. Within that nation, of course, there is always that small remnant chosen by grace.

Not many will be saved from other nations either. Symbolically, the stars represent believers. Toward the end of time, Satan will be loosed a little season and he will so dominate the corporate church that the latter will no longer be an effective witness; the stars will have been cast to the earth.

The mighty wind in this verse is the wind of God's wrath. It will blow first upon the apostate church (I Peter 4:17) during the final tribulation, then on the unsaved world on Judgment Day.

6:14. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

This verse reiterates that the universe will physically collapse. Such an end is clearly described in II Peter 3. We read in verses 3 to 6 there: "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished."

Indeed, scientists today insist that all things have evolved regularly for billions of years and will continue to do so in the future. They are "willingly ignoring" the precedent God has given us: the flood of Noah's day. That flood was a historical event that cannot be denied by anyone who looks honestly at the fossils existing in the rocks all over the world.

Regularly, animals and insects do not fossilize when they die. Their bones reduce to dust and eventually become part of the earth. Only the enormous pressure generated by a flood of cataclysmic proportion could have brought about the fossils that we find.

Dire promise. But II Peter 3:10 promises: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." God is saying: Make no mistake, on

the last day this universe will indeed be destroyed. It is a historical event that will surely take place.

The heaven departed as a scroll, this verse says. The word "scroll" is from the Greek word *biblion*, which God uses many times in the Scripture to identify the Bible. Thus, God is tying the departure, or the closing, of the heaven to the rolling together of the Bible. He is stressing that the salvation offered in the Bible comes from heaven above. On the last day, both the universe and God's salvation plan will come to an end.

That mountains and islands will move out of their places also have a spiritual meaning. In the Bible, mountains are sometimes used as a figure of earthly kingdoms; and islands, of peoples. In Jeremiah 51:25, for example, God calls Babylon "a destroying mountain". And we read in Psalm 97:1, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." There, God is clearly talking about peoples of the earth.

Amplification. Isaiah 34, which also discusses the end of the world, amplifies this point. Its first five verses read:

Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.

And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.

For my sword shall be bathed in heaven.

When God's judgment comes upon the nations, the peoples of the earth will find that their foundation is gone. They will belatedly discover that they have trusted in something that has no strength or stability. Every island and mountain will be moved from its place.

6:15. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains.

Notice the people listed here. They include those who thought they had something going for them. They had fame, power and wealth; they were the masters of their soul. They dared to live out their lives without facing God.

But the list also includes the bondmen, the slaves, that is. Whatever their social strata were, all the unsaved will suddenly realize that Judgment Day has come. All they can do then is to hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains.

The same truth shines through from Isaiah 2. We read from verse 17: "And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (vv. 17-19).

6:16. And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

Realizing that it is too late for salvation, they ask the mountains and rocks to kill them, to crush them. They wish they could die so that they do not have to face Judgment Day.

This desire to escape judgment is also prophesied in Hosea. Talking about the final tribulation upon the apostate church, Hosea

10:8 says, "The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us."

But they will all be calling in vain. There is no escape. The Bible has made it abundantly clear: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

6:17. For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

When Jesus was hanging on the cross on "the great and the terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31), God poured down His wrath on Christ. He was punished for all those whom He came to seek and save.

Now, Judgment Day will come in all of its fury to the unsaved. This world has reached its last day of existence. The great day of His wrath is come. Every person who has not trusted Christ as his Lord and Savior will have to stand before the judgment throne of God to answer for his sins. And just one sin will be sufficient to send him to hell.

And who shall be able to stand? Who can stand before God without being sentenced to spend eternity in hell? No one. Everyone who has not become saved will be found guilty. Nor will believers of the Lord Jesus Christ stand there. They will be sitting with the Lord judging the world.

The sixth seal, then, is a tremendous warning to the world. Judgment Day is coming. So, make sure that you are saved. Don't try to wait until tomorrow or some other time. You may not be living tomorrow. Even if you are, time is running out. Cry out to God for mercy while today is still the day of salvation. You may never have another chance.

Revelation 7

Lesson 10 for Revelation 7:1-6 ~ "Who are 'All the Tribes'?"¹⁰

7:1. And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

With the first six seals having been opened in Chapter 6 and the seventh yet to be opened in Chapters 8 and 9, this chapter is an interlude of sorts. Before God proceeds with the last seal, which has to do with His judgment process, He has something special to tell us.

In a brand new vision, John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds from blowing on the earth, the sea and the trees. As we have learned before, the number four in the Bible often symbolizes universality. So, its repeated use in this verse stresses that the "blowing" that is being held back will eventually affect the whole world.

Four winds. The term "four winds" in the Bible usually relates to some action of God that comes from heaven. In Jeremiah 49, for instance, where God warns that He is going to pour His wrath upon various wicked nations, He says in verse 36, "And upon Elam will I bring the four winds of heaven."

Sometimes, the action is a blessing from God. Referring to the gathering of His people on the last day, Jesus says in Matthew 24:31, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet,

¹⁰ *New Life Digest*, Second Quarter 1997.

[Original Series – Revelation 7:1-4 "Who Are Those 144,000?", *NLD*, Issue No. 2, 1989; Revelation 7:5-6 "Six Symbols of Believers", *NLD*, Issue No. 3, 1989.]

and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

So, this verse is anticipating an action of God that will affect the whole world. As we move on to the next two chapters, we will discover that it has to do with God’s judgment.

Significantly, while the Bible often uses the term “the four winds of heaven” or something to that effect, it says “the four winds of the earth” here. The earth, as it contrasts with heaven, relates to that which is evil. I believe God is indicating here that this time He will let Satan loose to take over the apostate church throughout the world.

Earth, sea and trees. The three things on which the wind is not yet allowed to blow are all symbols used to represent the people of the earth. We read in Isaiah 24:20: “The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again.” There, God is saying that the wicked people of the earth, because of their transgression, will fall and not rise again.

The use of the sea to represent people is exemplified by Isaiah 57:20,21: “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

The Bible typifies the nation of Israel as a fig tree, and the body of believers as an olive tree. And in Psalm 1, it describes the child of God as a tree planted by the rivers of water.

In Ezekiel 31, however, God likens the Assyrian to a cedar in Lebanon. And pointing to Judgment Day, He says in Jeremiah 7:20: “Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched.”

Since verse 3, as we’ll see, points also to Judgment Day, the trees here also represent the unsaved of the world.

7:2,3. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

Remember, the words “angel” and “messenger” are both translated from the Greek word *aggelos*. Here, the “angel” ascending from the east is really the Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Messenger. Speaking of Him, Malachi 3:1 says, “the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.”

The Lord Jesus has the seal of the living God, which is to be used to seal the servants of God in their foreheads. This sealing symbolizes salvation, because in Revelation 9:4, the unsaved are described as those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. The forehead signifies the mind of man. Believers are commanded to be transformed by the renewing of their mind.

A guarantee. The seal is really the Holy Spirit. We read in Ephesians 1:13,14: “ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” The word earnest means a pledge, a down payment or a guarantee.

When we become saved, God gives us the Holy Spirit as a seal to assure us that all of God’s promises and commitments concerning our salvation shall be accomplished. This is a grand and wonderful truth. It means that we can never lose our salvation.

So, God is reassuring us in verse 3 that before the four angels are finally loosed to hurt the people of the world, all of God’s elect must first

have become saved. Only after that will Judgment Day come.

7:4. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

Most theologians teach that this verse is talking about believers coming from national Israel. Such a conclusion cannot stand the scrutiny of the Holy Scripture itself.

To start with, note that this verse speaks of “all the tribes” of Israel, while the next four verses list the names of only twelve tribes. The fact is, national Israel had more than twelve tribes. True, Jacob did have twelve sons. But Joseph was given a double portion so that his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, each headed a separate tribe. As a result, Israel had altogether thirteen tribes.

Since God specifically uses the phrase “all the tribes” in this verse and then lists only twelve immediately afterwards, He could not possibly have the nation of Israel in view.

Two missing. Moreover, when we go through verses 5 through 8, we find that the tribes of Ephraim and Dan are missing. Instead, it says, “Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand.” There never was such a tribe. Elsewhere in the Bible, only once did the phrase “Of the tribe of Joseph” appear – at the beginning of Numbers 13:11. And it was immediately qualified by the statement: “namely, of the tribe of Manasseh.” Manasseh was the firstborn son of Joseph.

That God included Manasseh in Revelation 7, but omitted his brother Ephraim is significant. In Genesis 48, Jacob actually gave his grandson Ephraim the superior blessing, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. And later on, Ephraim did prove to be the more prominent tribe of the two.

One might argue that perhaps God merely substituted the name Joseph for this son. But that does not explain why the tribe of Dan is also omitted. If God is indeed talking about all the tribes of national Israel, then there should also be twelve thousand sealed from the tribe of Dan. Unless God made a mistake – which, of course, He didn’t and couldn’t – no way can this verse be talking about national Israel.

Israel of God. Rather, what God has in view is the Israel of God, the body of believers. This is confirmed by the way the New Testament Book of James begins. It says, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.” The message of James is clearly meant for the New Testament church. With that opening statement, God is declaring in no uncertain terms that we believers are spiritually the twelve tribes of the Israel of God.

Actually, when that epistle was written, or even in the days of Jesus, there were no longer twelve or thirteen distinct Israeli tribes in existence. During the several hundred years prior to that, people of the different tribes had widely intermixed. On top of that, many other Jews had intermarried with the Assyrians and become Samaritans.

That’s why the New Testament no longer speaks of the nation of Israel in terms of tribes. Yes, there are references of a few individuals coming from specific tribes. Paul, for example, is of the tribe of Benjamin, and Anna is of the tribe of Asher. But when God refers to the nation or the people in general, He simply calls them Israelites or Jews, because most of them came from Judah, the main surviving tribe.

Deliberate Omission

Once we understand that Revelation 7 is talking about all believers, we can also understand why God purposely omitted Dan and Ephraim from the list. In Genesis 49, the Bible records for us

what Jacob said about the future of his twelve sons. We read in verses 17 and 18: “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”

An adder is a poisonous serpent, and a serpent in the Bible is a figure for Satan. To “fall backward” means to come under the judgment of God. So, God is typifying Dan as an emissary of Satan, something that is most reprehensible.

False teachers. The tribe of Dan was not Satanic in itself. But God is teaching us there that wherever there are congregations of believers, there will be false believers among them that are servants of Satan. This was true when Jesus was on earth. The Lord Himself called the Twelve to be His apostles, yet one of them, Judas, was of the devil. Christ knew that all along; but He called Judas nevertheless because it was an integral part of God’s salvation plan. Jesus had to be betrayed by one of His followers.

That Satan’s emissaries will keep subverting the true gospel from within the church is also warned by II Peter 2:1: “There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies.” Likewise, II Timothy 4 notes that the time will come when the church will no longer endure sound doctrine, but will gather around them false teachers who preach what their itching ears want to hear.

Idolatry. God may have omitted Dan and Ephraim also because of their spiritual fornication. When Israel was divided into two nations, the northern kingdom was ruled over by a very wicked king named Jeroboam. He immediately built golden calves and caused the people of the ten tribes to worship them. He set one of the golden calves in Dan to the north and the other in Bethel, which was within Ephraim’s territory, to the south. So, it was in these two tribes that idol worship began to proliferate.

The northern kingdom of the ten tribes did not produce a single good king; every ruler did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Because Ephraim was the most prominent of the ten tribes, God often uses its name to represent that apostate kingdom. We read in Hosea 6:10, for instance, “I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel; there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled.”

God also uses Dan and Ephraim to typify the false prophets who are to dominate the apostate church just before the end of time. Thus, we read in Jeremiah 4:14–16: “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim. Make ye mention to the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah.”

Symbolic Number

What about the 144,000 then, the number of them which were sealed? We have already established that the twelve tribes are not referring to national Israel. So, contrary to what many are teaching, these 144,000 cannot have anything to do with believers from national Israel.

There are others who teach that these 144,000 are literally all the special people God will have for Himself. For the total number of believers to be so small is also an impossibility. True, believers are but a remnant chosen by grace. It is small, compared to the billions of people that have ever lived on this earth. Still, God speaks of them as a vast company, relating them to the stars of the heaven.

A great multitude. In fact, verse 9 of this chapter says, “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood

before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." These are the same people represented by 144,000, the number that John heard.

To resolve this seeming contradiction, we must interpret this number symbolically. In the Bible, especially in the Book of Revelation, God frequently uses the number twelve to signify the fullness of the body of believers. Remember we looked at the four and twenty elders and learned that they represent all believers? Twenty-four is the sum of twelve plus twelve. Here, 144,000 is the product of twelve times twelve times 1,000. A thousand is a number that represents the completion of God's plan.

Later on, when we get to Revelation 21, we will find God using the Holy City, New Jerusalem, to symbolize the bride, the Lamb's wife. And we will see that it is a city that measures twelve thousand furlongs by twelve thousand furlongs by twelve thousand furlongs. It has twelve gates and twelve foundations, and it has a wall that measures 144 cubits.

We believers, of course, are the bride of Christ. Hence, to describe the Holy City, New Jerusalem, God repeatedly features the number twelve.

All the redeemed. In Revelation 14, moreover, God will talk about the 144,000 again. We will see that they all have the Father's name written on their foreheads, and that they were redeemed from the earth. From the context of that chapter, we will see once more that every person who has become a child of God, every person who has been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus, is a part of this 144,000.

Before we leave this verse, I should point out that the prophecies concerning the tribes of Israel made by Jacob in Genesis 49 and by Moses in Deuteronomy 33 have never been fulfilled by national Israel. Nor can they ever be in the future, since these individual tribes no longer exist.

As we study these prophecies carefully below, we will find that they all have to do with the spiritual Israel of God. We will discover that every one of these tribes identifies with some aspect of the New Testament church.

The Last Days

In Genesis 49, just before Jacob began to deliver his deathbed prophecy to his twelve sons, he said to them in verse 1, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days."

The last three words there – "the last days" – give us an important time clue. In the whole *King James Bible*, the term "last days" appears only in eight verses. Besides Genesis 49:1, they are Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1, Acts 2:17, II Timothy 3:1, Hebrews 1:2, James 5:3 and II Peter 3:3. In all these cases, that term talks either about the whole New Testament period, or the short period just before the end of time.

Hebrews 1 begins, for instance: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

Latter days. The Hebrew word for "last" is sometimes translated "latter" in the Bible. And in the Old Testament, the term "latter days" is also a figure pointing to the New Testament period.

Hosea 3, for example, talks about the Messiah coming to reconcile the children of Israel to God, and verse 5 there reads, "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."

Once we understand that even back in Genesis, when Jacob was talking about the future of his twelve sons, he was really prophesying events

of the New Testament period, we can then fully appreciate the fact that the people with whom God is particularly concerned, and for whom He died on the cross, are the spiritual Israel of God. In short, all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

7:5a. Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand.

To ascertain that the twelve specific tribes God has listed in Revelation 7 do typify the New Testament church, let's examine what Jacob had to say in Genesis 49 of each of them at his deathbed. Just before Moses died, he also pronounced blessings on the individual tribes. So, we will study those statements in Deuteronomy 33 as well.

We start with Judah, the first tribe on the list. Remember, the 12,000 for each tribe is a number symbolizing the fullness of all those who are to be saved under God's salvation plan.

(1) Judah. "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee." (Gen. 49:8) Immediately, we know that this prophecy is not talking about the nation of Israel. The other sons of Jacob, the brothers of Judah, never praised or bowed down before him.

The Judah here, rather, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who was of the tribe of Judah. He was in the neck of His enemies because He defeated Satan at the cross. And we are the children of God, the brethren who praise and worship Him. Because Christ is typified by the tribe of Judah, we believers who are in Christ are typified by Judah as well.

"Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?" (v. 9) When we studied Revelation 5:5, we saw that Christ is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah". As a lion's whelp or cub, He was the prey of Satan; He was crucified. But He is alive; He has gone up to heaven. And as an old lion, He will come back to judge His enemies. Now stooping down and couching, He will be roused up once the church is completed.

"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (v. 10) Jesus is the ruler from whom the scepter, which is an emblem of authority, will not depart. We read in Hebrews 1:8: "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

Christ is also the lawgiver who came from between the feet of Judah – that is, from the seed of Judah. "Shiloh", as it is used here, is a reference to the Messiah as He returns to gather His people and to judge the unsaved.

"Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes" (v. 11). Remember Jesus says in John 15 that He is the vine and we are the branches that abide in Him? In this verse, we the branches are represented by the foal and the ass's colt. Note also that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, He rode on an ass and a colt, which is the foal of an ass (Matt. 21:7). It is a picture of the King ruling over His kingdom, the body of Christ.

The "wine" in the second half of this verse represents His shed blood; and the blood of grapes, God's wrath upon sinners (Rev. 14:19,20). Because God had laid on Him the iniquity of us all, He had to wash His garments by dying on the cross, enduring the wrath of God for all our sins.

"His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk." (v. 12) This verse is again speaking of Christ paying for our sins. He shed His blood in order to bring us into a land flowing with milk

and honey – even though He Himself is absolutely pure.

"And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies." (Deut. 33:7)

Again, the language here is pointing to Christ. He was brought into the world to seek and save His people; His hands – that is, His will, His power and authority – were sufficient for Him to do His work.

And God did help Him from His enemies. Just before He went to the cross He told His disciples, "ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (John 16:32).

7:5b. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand.

(2) Reuben. "Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." (Gen. 49:3) In the historical context, Reuben was indeed the first son born to Jacob. "But," says I Chronicles 5:1, "forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel." We'll find Jacob referring to that in the next verse.

Since the cross, actually, none of the thirteen tribes of Israel has ever been considered the firstborn in any sense. This prophecy of the "last days" can only be talking about the New Testament church. We believers are called the firstborn because Christ is the firstborn. According to Hebrews 12:23, all those who have become saved have come "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven".

Again, "my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power" no doubt refers to the Lord Jesus in the first instance. But these attributes have also been counted for us because we are identified with Christ and are indwelt by His Spirit. Hence, the Lord Jesus says in Acts 1:8, "Ye shall receive power..."

"Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few" (Deut. 33:6). Only believers of the Lord Jesus Christ have eternal life and shall not perish. And though we are but a remnant chosen by grace, there'll still be a great multitude of us, not just a few.

"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch" (Gen. 49:4). The word "excel" is from the Hebrew word *yathar*, which is so translated only in this verse. Elsewhere, it is translated "be left" 39 times and "remain" 20 times. Either of those two translations would be more suitable here. God is saying that Reuben, because he committed adultery with his father's wife, would not be left, or remain, the firstborn.

The adulterous act of Reuben is recorded in Genesis 35:22. As a result of that, he indeed did not receive the blessing of the firstborn. Joseph, instead, was given a double portion of the inheritance.

7:5c. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.

(3) Gad. "Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last" (Gen. 49:19). The word "troop" in the Bible normally means an invading force, especially an evil one. Actually, the name "Gad" itself also means troop. He was given that name because when he was born, a troop was coming (Gen. 30:11). Before we were saved, spiritually, we had all been overcome by an evil force, Satan. But as believers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have become the overcomers; we are the conquerors at last.

"And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad; he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head" (Deut. 33:20). Here's the historical context. Before the Israelites went into

the promised land, Gad, Reuben and half of the Manasseh tribe asked Joshua for permission to have as their inheritance the land on the east side of the Jordan River. That land was especially suitable for their sheep and cattle. They were given the permission – provided that when the time came for the rest of Israel to cross the Jordan, they would fight with them and help them conquer the land. That they subsequently did.

Thus, as a lion dwells in the wilderness, the tribe of Gad dwelt on the unprotected side of the River Jordan. To fight against outsiders, they had to have the strength of a crowned king.

“And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel” (v. 21). By settling on the east side before the other nine and a half tribes, Gad provided the first part for himself. He was able to do so “because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated”; in other words, God allowed him to settle there as his portion.

Later, he crossed the Jordan “with the heads of the people” – that is, with the leaders of the other tribes – and helped destroy the Canaanites, thereby executing “the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel.”

Redemption. Symbolically, the two-and-a-half tribes that settled on the east side of the Jordan are a picture of the New Testament church. Two-and-a-half is 2 plus 1/2 (or 0.5); or 5 times 0.5. As we’ve previously learned when we studied Revelation 1:12, spiritually the number two symbolizes the church.

Similarly, the number five often symbolizes the grace or redemption of God. For example, the temple tax, which itself signified redemption, was half a shekel. And when David fought Goliath, he put five stones in a bag, although he only used one to kill the giant. The grace of God gave him victory.

So, 2 + 0.5 emphasizes that the New Testament church is made up of people who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. And 5 x 0.5 underscores that it is all the grace of God.

Even as Gad settled on the wilderness side of the Jordan, we are sojourning in a hostile world and can easily be assaulted by the forces of evil. But we are protected by Christ, the lion of Judah who has been crowned King of kings. Like the two-and-a-half tribes, we join hands with other believers doing the work of God, conquering people for Christ.

7:6a. Of the tribe of Asher were sealed twelve thousand.

(4) **Asher.** “Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties” (Gen. 49:20). This prophecy is being fulfilled by the New Testament church – not the nation of Israel – since we are the ones who have become spiritually fat on the bread which is the Lord Jesus Christ. To us, this Bread of Life is resplendent in spiritual nourishment.

The Hebrew word for “dainties” here is only found in two other places in the Bible. Lamentations 4:5 is one, and the word is translated “delicately” there. That verse reads, “They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills.”

This is a negative statement. The passage – for that matter, the whole Book of Lamentations – talks about the apostasy that will beset the church during the final tribulation period. Nevertheless, the phrase “they that fed delicately” refers to those who originally had the riches of the gospel.

Pleasing to God. In Proverbs 29:17, that same Hebrew word is translated “delight”. It reads, “Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.” Here, God uses

the example of a father correcting his son to teach that those whom God chastises are those whom He regards as sons and who delight His soul. Thus, the word “delight” also refers to those who have been saved.

Comparing Scripture with Scripture, we can thus understand the phrase “he shall yield royal dainties” in Genesis 49:20 to mean that as believers send forth the gospel, many people will become saved.

“Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil” (Deut. 33:24). Here again, Asher is a picture of believers carrying out the Great Commission. The church will be blessed with more and more children of God as a result, and believers will accept one another as brothers.

The Bible often uses one’s feet to represent the whole person. A man with naked feet, for example, is a picture of him standing spiritually naked before God. Before we are saved, our feet are naked and dirty. Oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit by which each of us is anointed a prophet, a priest and a king. When we become saved, our feet are cleansed by the Holy Spirit; they are dipped in oil.

“Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” (v. 25) Iron and brass signify strength. We believers have the strength to overcome sin and Satan because our feet are now covered by Christ’s righteousness; we wear the shoes of His victory.

The statement “as thy days, so shall thy strength be” means that our strength grows with the passage of time. In the physical world, it doesn’t hold true. After we reach adulthood, our strength first levels off and then weakens as we approach older age. Nor does that statement hold true for the nation of Israel in any sense.

It makes abundant sense, however, in describing the body of Christ. How long are the days of the child of God? Forever. And in Christ, our strength is infinite. Thus, Paul writes, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

7:6b. Of the tribe of Naphtali were sealed twelve thousand.

(5) **Naphtali.** “Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words” (Gen. 49:21). “Hind” is an old English word for deer. We read in Psalm 18:32,33: “It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet, and setteth me upon my high places.” Notice how this passage reaffirms what we have just learned? That is, God girds us with His strength. God also makes our feet like the feet of a deer, thereby typifying believers by deer.

Generally, the Bible speaks of believers as sheep because it is an animal highly dependent on the shepherd. But here God picks this delightful animal to show a different characteristic of the child of God. The feet of a deer are delicate, yet very strong. We are weak on our own, but strong in Christ.

And we have been let loose. You see, an unsaved person is in bondage to sin; he is a slave of Satan. When we become saved, however, Satan and sin can no longer control us. As children of God, we send forth the gospel, we give people the “goodly words”.

“And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord: possess thou the west and the south.” (Deut. 33:23) “Favour” is the grace of God. We, represented here by Naphtali, are more than satisfied with the salvation which God has graciously given us. We are full with the blessing of Christ. As joint heirs with the Lord Jesus, we are to be the possessors of the new heaven and the new earth. Do you see how close this language is to that which we have just studied in connection with Asher? That’s because the truth is the same.

One more. In addition to these Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 statements, there is one other prophecy about Naphtali that we should also read, which, incidentally, also applies to Zebulun. And it is found in Isaiah 9:1,2: “...when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”

This prophecy is quoted in Matthew 4 as having been fulfilled when Jesus started to minister in Capernaum. It was upon the sea coast, in the borders where Zebulun and Naphtali previously had their land. Note that God speaks of Zebulun and Naphtali as “Galilee of the nations”. In other words, He uses the land of Zebulun and Naphtali to typify believers from all the nations of the world.

7:6c. Of the tribe of Manasseh were sealed twelve thousand.

(6) **Manasseh.** There is no reference to Manasseh in either Genesis 49 or Deuteronomy 33 because both Jacob and Moses blessed Joseph, the father of Manasseh and Ephraim. When we look at Joseph later on in this chapter, we will get some insights into Manasseh.

Actually, we already got some insights from our study of Gad because the tribe of Gad, together with the tribe of Reuben and half of the tribe of Manasseh, settled on the east side of the Jordan River. We saw that those two-and-a-half tribes were a picture of the New Testament church.

Like Reuben, moreover, Manasseh was the firstborn. He came ahead of his brother Ephraim. Manasseh, therefore, is also a picture of all believers.

Lesson 11 for Revelation 7:7-17 ~ “The Great Multitude”¹¹

7:7a. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand.

(7) **Simeon.** “Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Gen. 49:5-7). The historical account that led God to make this harsh statement about Simeon and Levi is recorded in Genesis 34. Jacob, after having lived in Haran for 40 years, returned to the land of Canaan and camped near a city called Shechem. There, a young man, also named Shechem, fell in love with his daughter Dinah and committed adultery with her.

Dinah’s brothers, the sons of Jacob, were greatly angered and grieved by that. But Hamor, the father of Shechem, came to Jacob and asked if Dinah could marry Shechem. He was willing to give any dowry that Jacob would ask. The brothers thereupon concocted an evil plan under the guise of something holy. To permit such a marriage, they demanded that all the men of Shechem be circumcised. The people of Shechem agreed. On the third day, when the men of Shechem were still immobilized from the circumcision, Simeon and Levi went and killed every last one of them.

Judgment. As a judgment against them, Jacob prophesied that these two tribes would not

¹¹ *New Life Digest*, Third Quarter 1997. [Original Series – Revelation 7:7-8 “More Symbols of the Church”, *NLD*, Issue No. 4, 1989; Revelation 7:9-17 “The Great Multitude”, *NLD*, Issue No. 5, 1989.]

receive any independent inheritance in the land of Israel. For Simeon, the fulfillment of that prophecy is found in Joshua 19:1: "And the second lot came forth to Simeon...and their inheritance was within the inheritance of the children of Judah." Simeon's land was within the land of Judah. In fact, this act of mass murder was so reprehensible in God's eyes that when Moses gave his deathbed blessing to the various tribes in Deuteronomy 33, he omitted Simeon altogether.

Through these sad events, however, God was setting Simeon up as a figure of the body of Christ. Like Simeon, we are by nature all cruel and murderous. "Out of our heart," Jesus says, "come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts and all manners of wickedness" (Matt. 15:19).

Again like Simeon, we ourselves do not deserve any independent inheritance. Our inheritance comes from that of Christ, and Christ was of the tribe of Judah.

7:7b. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand.

(8) **Levi.** What was said of Simeon in Genesis 49 was also said of Levi. Like Simeon, Levi did not receive an independent inheritance. They were given 48 cities within the inheritances of the other twelve tribes. But God also picked the tribe of Levi to represent Christ Himself in a very special way. We can see that in Exodus 12. Just before God brought the tenth plague upon Egypt, He told the people of Israel to kill a lamb and smear its blood on their door posts. That night, when God came to kill the firstborn in Egypt, He passed over those houses that had blood on the door posts, thereby sparing the firstborn in them.

Substitution. The blood on the door post represented, of course, the shed blood of Christ; Jesus was our substitute in suffering God's wrath. Alluding to that night, God later said to Moses: "I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix [the womb] among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD" (Num. 3:12,13).

In essence, God was saying, because He killed all the firstborn of Egypt, the firstborn of Israel were likewise His to kill. (The firstborn stand for the whole human race because they are the ones who open the womb that brings forth the new generation.) But He allowed the tribe of Levi to substitute for those firstborn. This tribe is thus a type of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The priesthood. In Numbers 18, God made a distinction between the priesthood that came out of the tribe of Levi and the rest of the tribe. We read in verse 1: "The LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood."

Here, God gave the priests the specific duty of "bearing the iniquity of the sanctuary". They alone were to be identified with the altar and the burnt sacrifices; they were thus a type of Christ, who alone bore the sins of believers at the cross.

Other Levites. God then talked about the rest of the tribe of Levi in verses 2 and 3: "And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee...And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die."

These other Levites had nothing to do with the atonement, but were nevertheless joined to the priests in ministering in the tabernacle. They

thereby symbolize all believers, who are joined to Christ and who minister under Christ's direction.

Note that those Levites that were not priests were not allowed to take part in the service of the altar; otherwise, they would die. Likewise, if we work toward our salvation or take some credit for it, we would be subject to eternal damnation.

All believers. Sometimes, God uses the whole tribe of Levi to represent the body of believers. Speaking of Christ being "the messenger of the covenant" that would come, for example, He said in Malachi 3:3, "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness."

Christ came to purify not everyone from the tribe of Levi, but all believers. So, the sons of Levi in that prophecy really refer to all those who believe in the Lord Jesus.

7:7c. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.

(9) **Issachar.** "Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens" (Gen. 49:14). Does God use an ass, or a donkey, to typify those who would become saved? Yes, indeed. In Exodus 13, we read in verse 12, "Thou shalt set apart unto the Lord all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD's." This parallels what we have just read from Numbers 3.

But then verse 13 continues, "And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb..." Of all animals, God specified there that the firstborn of the donkey was also to be redeemed by a lamb. That very sentence ends with this statement: "and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem," underscoring thereby that the donkey is a picture of the believer.

Perhaps God likens us to a donkey because by nature, we are ugly and stubborn like a donkey!

Two burdens? The Hebrew word for "two burdens" is used in only one other place in the Bible – Judges 5:16. Its translation there helps us better understand this verse. Judges 5 is a song of praise sung by Deborah and Barak. Leading 10,000 men of Zebulun and Naphtali, they had just won a momentous victory, freeing the children of Israel from the oppression of the Canaanites. In verse 18, they thanked God for those two tribes, saying: "Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field."

But the song also noted that Reuben had not helped in the fighting. They say in verses 15 and 16: "For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks?" In other words, in the land of Reuben, there was much soul searching as to why they had done nothing even though they stayed in the sheepfolds and heard the suffering of other sheep.

Evangelism. Spiritually, Sisera, the powerful Canaanite captain whom they defeated, was a picture of Satan. The men from Zebulun and Naphtali typified those believers who go out and defeat Satan with the gospel. Reuben, on the other hand, represents those who hesitate to share Christ with the world.

Now, the word "sheepfolds" there is from the same Hebrew word that is translated "two burdens" in Genesis 49:14. Thus, the latter can be read, "Issachar is a strong donkey couching down between the sheepfolds." It is saying that Issachar, still following his own stubborn will, was not yet ready to step out, or to be used by God, to serve Christ. But verse 15 continues: "And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute."

Issachar is now a picture of those who have become saved. He appreciates the rest we receive in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Kingdom of God that he has entered into. And now he humbles himself and becomes a bond servant of Christ.

(We will look at the blessing Moses gave Issachar in Deuteronomy 33 later when we look at Zebulun, because that prophecy applies to both Zebulun and Issachar. Suffice it to say here that Issachar was told to rejoice in the tents. The tents are the tabernacle that believers enter into. We rejoice that we have come into the Lord Jesus Christ.)

7:8a. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand.

(10) **Zebulun.** "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon" (Gen. 49:13). Remember when we looked at Naphtali, we saw in Isaiah 9:1 that both Naphtali and Zebulun were a picture of the Galilee of the nations? That same truth is reflected here.

The word "haven" means "at the seaside". Thus, Zebulun shall be a port for ships to come into and go out from. The term "ship" in the Bible, especially when it is used in "the ships of Tarshish", refers to the things of this world. But elsewhere in the Bible, ships are often used as a picture of the church as it sends forth the gospel.

Noah and his family, for example, were saved from the worldwide flood by being in a ship. And we often find Jesus and/or the apostles in a ship in the sea of Galilee. Thus, Zebulun is a seaport from which the gospel is sent out to the nations of the world. This idea is further developed in Deuteronomy 33:18,19: "And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand."

As noted earlier, we rejoice for being in the Lord Jesus Christ. We also rejoice for having the privilege to send forth the gospel to all nations.

The word "mountain" in the Bible often symbolizes a kingdom. And the mountain that Zebulun and Issachar are calling people into is the Kingdom of God. In the same vein, we read in Isaiah 2:2, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."

The term "seas" or "waters" frequently typify the wicked of the world. We read in Revelation 17, for instance, about the great whore who sits upon many waters. Verse 15 there explains that the waters are "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" over whom she rules. Similarly, Isaiah 57:20 says: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

It is from among the wicked of the world that believers are being drawn by the gospel. Before that, they were hidden in the sand. Thus, this verse is talking about the New Testament church sending forth the gospel to the unsaved. That task was never assigned to the nation of Israel.

7:8b. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand.

(11) **Joseph.** Joseph was clearly a type of Christ. Just as he was sold as a slave by his brothers, Christ was delivered to the Romans by His own people. As Joseph was put in a pit and in jail, Christ went down to hell for our sins. And as Joseph became Prime Minister of Egypt, Christ has been reigning with God.

Thus, in Genesis 49:22-24 Jacob gave him this blessing: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:

The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)"

Jesus, of course, is the vine and we, by abiding in Him, become fruitful branches, or boughs. He is also the well that brings forth the water of life. While He was grieved by those who hated Him and killed Him, He has, as we saw in Revelation 6, since been going forth conquering and to conquer riding on a white horse and holding a bow. He has been strengthened by the mighty God Himself.

Christ is also the Good Shepherd and "the stone of Israel" – He is the stumbling stone, the foundation stone, the chief cornerstone.

"Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb" (v. 25). The blessings God has given Christ are total, encompassing the "heaven above" and "the deep that lieth under". And they include "blessings of the breasts and of the womb", which means that Christ will have a multitude of children.

"The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren" (v. 26). The blessings that have come to the Lord Jesus Christ are greater than those given to Abraham and the other patriarchs. They extend into the everlasting hills; they are eternal.

Moreover, God has poured these blessings not only on the head of Christ, but on the head of all those who have been chosen among mankind to become saved. Yes, we who have been adopted as God's children are typified by Joseph also.

7:8c. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

(12) **Benjamin.** Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob and the second son of Rachel, for whom Jacob had great affection. Sadly, when he was born, Rachel died in childbirth. We read in Genesis 35:18, "And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin."

We are like Benjamin in that for us to have a spiritual birth, a death – that of Jesus – had to occur. And both of his names relate to the body of believers. Benjamin means "Son of My Right Hand"; and Benoni, "Son of My Sorrow".

In Ephesians, God speaks of Christ sitting at the right hand of God (1:20) and of believers sitting in the heavenly places with Christ (2:6). So, positionally, we are sitting at God's right hand.

Before we discuss the name "Son of My Sorrow", let's go first to Moses' blessing in Deuteronomy 33:12, as it carries the same line of thought. "And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the most beloved of Jehovah God, dwells with us. To keep us safe, He will never leave us nor forsake us. He covers us with His robe of righteousness and lets us dwell between His shoulders as a child rides on the back of his father. He is with us, He protects us and He carries us through hard times.

"Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. 49:27). In sharp contrast to Deuteronomy 33:12, this prophecy in Genesis is surprisingly negative. To "ravin" means to hungrily prey on other animals. So, God is saying that Benjamin shall devour as a wolf.

What does a preying wolf symbolize? In Ezekiel 22, God was criticizing the people of Israel for their apostasy, faulting them for breaking the law, profaning the holy things, and rejecting the authority of God's Word. We read in verse 27, "Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravaging the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain." There, He likened the behavior of Israel's leaders to wolves ravaging the prey, destroying souls in the process.

The same picture is painted in Zephaniah 3, where we read in verses 3 and 4: "Her princes within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves; they gnaw not the bones till the morrow. Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law."

End-time church. So, when God speaks of Benjamin being voraciously hungry as a wolf, devouring the prey and dividing the spoil, He is picturing the apostate church toward the end of time. That's why Benjamin is also named Benoni – the "Son of My Sorrow". Nothing brings more sorrow to God than for Him to see the church running after false gospels.

With the end of time rapidly approaching, the church has indeed become increasingly apostate. More and more churches are defying God's rule concerning divorce and the role of women in the church. They willfully ignore God's command to preach the whole counsel of God, offering instead salvation plans that are based on what people want to hear, not the gospel of the Bible.

Worse yet, the success story in Christendom of late has been the explosion of churches featuring tongues, dreams, and visions, which represent a blatant disregard of the warning not to have additional revelation beyond the written Bible. Yes, the corporate church is becoming the Son of My Sorrow to God. Thankfully, true believers, by the grace and strength of God, will endure to the end and will be saved.

7:9. After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

Back in verse 4, the Apostle John **heard** that the number of those who were sealed by God was 144,000. Those 144,000, we learned from studying verses 5-8, represent the fullness of all believers. Here in verse 9, John **beheld** "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." This is talking about the same people.

God had promised Abraham some 4,000 years earlier that he would be the father of a multitude of nations, and that his seed would be like the stars of the heaven and the sand of the seashore. In this vision, God shows that He has fulfilled that promise. It's a great multitude which no man could number.

Notice that they are of all nations, kindreds, people and tongues. The statement thus features the number four, highlighting the universality of God's salvation program. God saves people from all parts of the world. That they are standing before the throne is a triumphant scene. All of God's elect can now behold God face to face; all the lost sheep have been found. And they are standing before the Lamb because only by virtue of what Christ did for them at the cross are they now in heaven.

White robes and palms. The white robes with which they are clothed symbolize purity and holiness. Not only did Christ pay for all their sins, He has covered them with His wonderful robe of righteousness. Now, God sees them as being absolutely pure and holy, without wrinkle and without spot.

What do the palms in their hands stand for? A clue is given in Psalm 92:12,13, where God says, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree:

he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God."

You see, God uses the palm tree to picture that which flourishes in His courts, that which is rich and full and wonderful. And He likens the body of believers as palm trees planted in the house of the Lord. Thus, a multitude with palms in their hands is a picture of a people that is richly blessed.

7:10. And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

In Psalm 115, we read in verses 17 and 18, "The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD."

Only we saved people praise the Lord and magnify His holy name. We do so in this life as well as in eternity. We praise and worship Him by proclaiming in words and music who He is and what He has done, by putting ourselves and our wherewithal on the altar of service, and by living obediently to the glory of His name.

Incidentally, Psalm 115:17 notes that the dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence. That is talking about the spiritually dead, because when we believers die physically, our souls will be with the Lord and will keep praising Him throughout eternity. When the unsaved die physically, their souls go down into silence until the Last Day, when they will be resurrected and judged.

Note that this vast multitude of believers are crying their praises with a loud voice. They are not whispering; there is no question at all about their intent.

Salvation. They begin their praise by pointing to the salvation that God has provided them. When we dig into the Bible and uncover the spiritual truths that God has purposely hidden from the unsaved, we find one theme shining through time and again. And that is the wonderful salvation plan that God has provided for His elect. This is the key message God has for us.

The multitude attribute their salvation "to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb". The Lord Jesus is the Lamb who is seated on the throne, of course. He reigns as the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

To be sure, all three persons of the Godhead are involved with our salvation. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God the Father chose us to be in Christ before the foundation of the world. And it is the Father who draws us, Jesus said.

The Holy Spirit is also intimately identified with our salvation. He is the vanguard throughout the New Testament period, applying the Word of God to the hearts of sinful men so that they become born from above. He then indwells us believers to guarantee the completion of our salvation on the Last Day.

In this scene, though, the Bible focuses constantly upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the third person of the Godhead. Why? Because it was He who left the glories of heaven and took on a human nature and endured the wrath of God for our sins. It is He who rose again and dealt Satan a fatal blow.

7:11. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

Speaking of angels, God asks rhetorically in Hebrews 1:14, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" From that, we know that angels themselves are not heirs of salvation. Being ministering spirits, they were not given bodies

like ours; they were not created in the image of God.

God's plan for the angelic world is altogether different from that which He has for man. All the angels were probably created at the same time. At the least, we know that angels do not beget angels. "They neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30).

We learn from Isaiah 14 that a vast company of them followed the egotistical angel Lucifer (who became Satan) in rebelling against God when the latter tempted Eve to sin. After Christ's victory at the cross, they were all cast out of heaven into the earth (Rev. 12:9). Not given any salvation, these fallen angels will all be condemned to hell on Judgment Day (Jude 6). Meanwhile, as devils, evil spirits, and Satan's helpers, they are enemies of God.

Good angels. Those that did not rebel along with Satan, as far as we know from the Scriptures, will never be threatened with damnation nor with the possibility of falling into sin. In fact, they are intimately identified with God's salvation program for mankind.

Before God had finished writing the Bible, He had occasionally sent one or more angels to bring messages to mankind. Other than that, God has not revealed too much in the Scriptures as to when and how He uses them to minister to believers. But we do read this wonderful reassurance in Psalm 91:10,11: "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

Beholding God. And speaking of those who are in His kingdom, Jesus says in Matthew 18:10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." So, wherever believers are, we know that there are angels watching over them on behalf of God.

We also read in Luke 15:10 that when a sinner repents, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God. Not surprisingly, therefore, they are now rejoicing greatly; they are seeing the culmination of God's salvation plan.

These angels are standing round about the throne on which God sits, and also round about the elders and the four living creatures. Remember we learned in Chapters 4 and 5 that the elders represent all the believers and the living creatures, God Himself? So, this picture emphasizes that the angels are standing around God and the believers.

And they fall down before the throne on their faces and worship God. You see, in heaven every being praises God; everyone loves the Lord, everyone worships the Lamb.

7:12. Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

What a beautiful song of praise this is! All honor and glory and power and so on be unto God. He is the only one who deserves to receive them. Notice that the angels list seven attributes here. The number seven further reveals that they are praising God for His eternal perfection.

Note also that instead of just God, they use the term "our God". It indicates that they not only fully recognize God as their sovereign ruler, they have a close relationship with Him as well.

Remember what "amen" means? It means, "So be it." Having in heaven a great multitude of believers coming from all parts of the world is exactly what God had planned before the foundation of the world. Significantly, this statement of praise is bracketed by two Amens. God is doubly underscoring that truth. Not one of His elect will be left unsaved on Judgment Day.

7:13. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

Why does God ask John this question? Answer: To make sure that the apostle knows with absolute certainty whom this great multitude represents, so that all those who study what John has recorded here in Revelation will know as well.

7:14. And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Instead of answering, the Apostle John humbly indicates that he would rather be enlightened. Speaking for God, the elder then tells him this truth: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

When we see the words "great tribulation", we tend to think immediately of Matthew 24:21, where Jesus says, "For then shall be great tribulation..." Indeed, many theologians do teach that these people are all the believers that survived through, or were saved during, the final tribulation.

But before we accept that conclusion, note first that so far in Revelation, God has not referred to the great tribulation at all. Let's review what God has revealed to John up to this point, so we can better understand the context in which this statement appears.

Brief recap. Chapter 1 tells us about John being caught up into heaven where he was given a glimpse of "the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter". Chapters 2 and 3 then present seven messages from the Lord to the seven churches. They are, in fact, God's instructions to all congregations throughout the New Testament period. Chapter 4 then shows us the heavenly throne in which God sits; and Chapter 5, the Lamb of God who alone was worthy to take the scroll.

Symbolized by the opening of the first six seals, Revelation 6 then speaks figuratively of the sending forth of the gospel, the persecution of believers, the apostasy of the church, the mushrooming of false prophets, the anguish of martyred believers, and finally the eternal damnation of the unsaved.

God will not begin to talk about His judgment process until Chapter 8, which process ends with Judgment Day itself. And here in Revelation 7, He has been giving us assurance that Judgment Day will come only after all of those whom He had chosen to be saved will have become saved. Remember what we read in verse 3? "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."

In that context, God is now showing us that all the elect have indeed become saved. He has kept His promise. Notice carefully that this verse says, "These are they which came out of great tribulation" – not "the great tribulation". Instead of the final tribulation, this statement should be read in light of John 16:33, where Jesus tells His followers, "In the world ye shall have tribulation."

In His very first sermon, Jesus says: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12).

To be persecuted – that's tribulation. In the world, all believers will have tribulation. But once we get to heaven, we will have come out of a great deal of tribulation. The multitude, therefore, represents all believers.

Work of the Spirit. Ironically, those who teach that this great multitude are people who came

out of the final tribulation also teach that at some point before the end, the Holy Spirit will leave this earth and all believers will be raptured. After that, they say, the Jews will evangelize the world so that another vast company of people will be saved, and they are the ones pictured by these people standing before the throne.

Without realizing it, they are making a shambles of a basic biblical truth: it is the Holy Spirit who has been evangelizing the world since He was poured out on Pentecost. He applies the Word of God to the hearts of the elect, He convicts them of their sinful condition, and He causes them to repent and to believe on Christ.

When Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," He was referring to the period after Pentecost. Once the Holy Spirit leaves this earth, no amount of evangelizing will be able to save a single soul.

All nations. Note also that this multitude comprise people of all nations and tribes. It means that they include, for example, Ruth the Moabitess, as well as Abel and Enoch who were saved before the flood. The nations and tribes from which they came no longer exist. So, this group must represent all believers throughout time. They all went through great tribulation in their lives; but only the last generation will go through the final tribulation.

That they "have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" sounds like a contradiction. But this is written in figurative language. The shed blood of Christ has washed away our sins.

7:15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

Speaking of the new heaven and the new earth, Revelation 22:5 says, "there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever." Why, then, will these people in heaven "serve him day and night"?

Again, God is using earthly phenomena to give us spiritual insights. "Day and night" is an earthly phrase that gives the idea of something that goes on continuously. Effectively, God is saying that in heaven our service for Him will go on without ceasing.

Likewise the "temple" is used in this verse as a figure that represents the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Revelation 21:22, "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."

Among us. In a certain sense, when we believers are present in this body on earth, we are absent from the Lord. That's what the Bible declares in II Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23. But in another sense, we are never absent from the Lord because Jesus promises at the end of Matthew, "lo, I am with you always." He is with us in the person of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us.

But when we go to heaven, God will dwell among us in a far more intimate way. Throughout eternity, we will be in the literal presence of His glorious majesty.

7:16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." That's the hunger and thirst we'll never experience in heaven.

As soon as God starts to save us, we begin to find our lives empty and unfulfilling. We develop an increasing desire to study His Word, to know more about God and do His will. But on this earth, our hunger and thirst can never be fully satisfied. In heaven it will be. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I

know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Cor. 13:12).

The sun refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. Malachi 4:2 describes Him as "the Sun of righteousness (who would) arise with healing in his wings". In the context of this verse, though, He is the hot sun who judges the unsaved on the Last Day. Having become saved, we are no longer under the wrath of God. And this will hold true throughout eternity.

7:17. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Again and again, our Savior the Lamb is with us in the midst of the throne. He feeds us with His Word. He clothes us with His righteousness. He leads us into living fountains of water.

We find the same truth in Isaiah 49, where God was talking about the salvation that the promised Messiah would bring. Verse 7, for instance, spoke of "the Redeemer of Israel"; verse 8, "a day of salvation"; and verse 9, the liberating of "the prisoners" of Satan. Then we read in verse 10: "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."

Meanwhile, as we go through various tribulations in this world, we weep. We also weep about our sins, we weep over our unsaved loved ones, and we weep over man's inhumanity to man. But the Bible says, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:4). Already in this life, when a child of God hurts, he can nestle up to the Lord and feel His almighty arms around him. We know He works all things together for the good of those who love Him, and we know He never makes a mistake.

But when we are forever with the Lord Jesus Christ, our mourning will cease; all our hurts will vanish. That is the glorious hope our gracious God has given us!

Revelation 8

*Lesson 12 for Revelation 8:1-6 ~ "The Final Tribulation"*¹²

8:1. And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Through the opening of the first six seals, God shows us in Revelation 6 His program for the whole New Testament era. From the first seal where we see Christ riding forth victoriously on the white horse to evangelize the world, we get right up to Judgment Day with the opening of the sixth seal. At the end of that chapter, you may recall, the people of the world are saying to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

As an interlude, God gives us another glimpse of heaven in Chapter 7. There, we see a great multitude falling on their faces before the throne, praising and worshipping God for their salvation. These are the people whom God has saved.

Now, as God opens the seventh seal, He is going to give us a closer look at the events leading to, and culminating in, Judgment Day. From verse 2 of this chapter through Revelation 9, specifically, He will be talking about the final tribulation period. Then, beginning at the middle of Chapter 11, when the **last trumpet** is

sounded, He will be speaking of Judgment Day itself (see Rev. 11:15).

Vital addendum. Before that, though, God has one important piece of information to give us here in verse 1: "And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour."

In the Bible the word "silence" can be related to a number of things. We read in Zechariah 2:13, for instance, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation." There, God commands mankind to be quiet because He has roused himself from heaven and is coming to judge the world.

We find a similar command in Habakkuk 2. After proclaiming woes to those who put their trust in all kinds of man-made idols, God says in verse 20, "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

All this is summed up in Romans 3:19, where we read: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

When God comes to judge the world, every mouth will be silenced.

Silence in heaven. But here in Revelation 8:1, God is talking about silence in heaven. In this sense, there are at least two verses in the Old Testament that are particularly pertinent. The first is Psalm 50:3: "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." What is this fire that God is talking about? The fire of judgment. God is saying that He will not always keep silence. He is going to come as the judge of all the earth.

God issues a similar warning in Isaiah 65:6.7: "Behold, it is written before me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosom, your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the LORD..." Again, He is warning, "I will not keep silent. There is Judgment Day coming when I will pay you back for all your sins."

But turn that right around now. Here in Revelation 8:1, God says there is silence for a certain period of time. In other words, although I have given you much information about the timing of my return, there nevertheless is going to be a stay in judgment. In my sovereign good pleasure, I'm going to delay it for about the space of half an hour.

How long a period does that half hour represent? That's something we have yet to uncover from other parts of the Bible. But half is 0.5 and the number five, as we have learned before, often has to do with the grace of God. So, the verse is saying that God has delayed bringing judgment to the world so that His grace can continue a little longer.

8:2. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness, trumpets were blown to call the people to assemble, to warn the people of approaching danger, and to signal the camps to set out or to make camp. The trumpets also played a major role after they had crossed the Jordan and proceeded to take the fortified city of Jericho. At the moment the priests sounded the trumpets the seventh time on the seventh day, the wall of Jericho collapsed. What did those trumpets symbolize?

Back in Revelation 1, remember, the apostle John heard behind him "a great voice, as of a trumpet" and found that it was Jesus talking to him. So, that sound of trumpets is the voice of God. Thus, just as the trumpets directed the movement of the Israelites in the wilderness, the Word of God now guides us in our pilgrimage on this earth. And the trumpets that devastated

Jericho were a picture of God condemning the unsaved on Judgment Day.

Prelude. Here, the seven angels are given seven trumpets because Christ is about to start His judgment process. Let me hasten to point out, though, that Revelation 8 and 9, which are associated with the sounding of the first six trumpets, are not talking about Judgment Day. The latter is discussed in Revelation 11, when the seventh trumpet is sounded.

We know that because Chapter 9 closes with this statement: "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood; which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk. Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

In other words, even after the first six trumpets, those who remain on earth will still be rebellious. In contrast, Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10,11 declare that when Judgment Day finally comes, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. What we will read in Revelation 8 and 9, therefore, is about the period just before the delay spoken of in verse 1 and Judgment Day itself.

During this period, the last generation of believers will still be living on earth. That's because we learned from John 5 and 6 and Daniel 12 when we studied Revelation 4:2 that believers will be raised and raptured on the last day. We learned further from John 12:48 that the last day is also Judgment Day.

The great tribulation. Nevertheless, most churches have in recent decades been telling people that believers will be raptured long before the last day. This is not all that surprising as God warns in II Timothy 4:3 that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears."

People are so afraid of having to go through the final tribulation that, instead of learning the "sound doctrine" on the end of time, they embrace those teachers who say what their itching ears want to hear. But let's look at a few more passages about the rapture of believers. We read in Matthew 24:21: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

That, of course, is talking about the final tribulation. Now, verse 29: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." That's the last day, the collapse of the universe. (Incidentally, the word "immediately" there is from the Greek *eutheos*, which can also be translated "shortly". For instance, God uses that same word in III John 14. There, the apostle John said to Gaius, who was living in a different city, "I trust I shall shortly [*eutheos*] see thee, and we shall speak face to face." At any rate, the collapse of the universe will take place either immediately or shortly after the final tribulation, not before.)

What happens then? Matthew 24:30,31: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

That's the rapture! It occurs on the last day.

The last trump. The gathering of the saints, it says there, will be heralded by the sound of the trumpet. Of that trumpet, God gives us more information in I Corinthians 15:51,52: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump:

¹² *New Life Digest*, Fourth Quarter 1997. [Original Series – Revelation 8:1-6 "Introducing the Final Tribulation", *NLD*, Issue No. 6, 1989.]

for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

The last trump, as we will see in Revelation 11, is the seventh trumpet, which is Judgment Day.

Now, let's read I Thessalonians 4:16,17: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Note that those who have died in Christ will rise first, and those believers who are still alive will then be caught up together with them. If believers were to be raptured before the unsaved, then the resurrection of those who have died in Christ must also precede that of the unsaved. But we read in John 5:28,29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

Here, God even uses the word "hour", instead of "day", to emphasize that believers and unbelievers alike will be raised at the same time.

8:3. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Back in Revelation 5:8 we saw the four and twenty elders falling down before the Lamb "having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours [incense], which are the prayers of saints." But here, the angel was given much incense and it was to be offered along with the prayers of the saints.

To understand that, let's go back to Leviticus 16. There, God commanded the high priest to go into the Holy of Holies alone once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. And we read in verses 12 and 13: "And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not."

That annual ritual was a picture of Christ going to the cross all alone to atone for our sins. The animal blood typified the blood that He shed; the burning coals, the hell fire that He went through; and the smoke of the incense, the sweet fragrance that He brought to God, because the atonement was fully satisfactory to the Father. The burning incense was also a picture of Jesus praying for believers, as He does in John 17.

This verse is thus saying that because Christ has provided atonement for the saints, they can now offer their sacrifices of praise, as well as their petitions, upon the altar before the throne of God.

8:4. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.

The prayers of the saints do indeed ascend up before God. The fact that they go up along with the smoke of the incense means that, even as we pray, the Lord Jesus Himself intercedes for us. In the context of Revelation 8, this verse is most encouraging. It reassures the last generation of believers on earth that even during the final tribulation period, their prayers will be heard.

Meanwhile, God is also answering the pleas of the souls of saints that we saw in Revelation 6. Having cried out to God to avenge their blood, they were then told to rest yet for another season. Now, their waiting period is over; the time for God to avenge them has come.

8:5. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

To help understand this verse, let's go first to Numbers 16. The people of Israel were then sojourning in the wilderness. One day, 250 assembly leaders, instigated by a Levi and two Reubenites, rebelled against Aaron and Moses. They wanted to have the authority that Moses had and also the right to be priests. That rebellion so angered the Lord that He destroyed them all.

The next morning, the entire congregation, instead of learning to be obedient, murmured against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of having killed the people of the Lord. God then poured out His wrath, and a plague started among the people. Moses immediately told Aaron to take fire off the altar and some incense and put them in a censer, and run with the censer into the midst of the congregation. Aaron did that and the plague was stayed. Even so, nearly 15,000 people died.

That censer holding fire from the altar and incense again represented the atonement Christ offered. So, this historical parable teaches that when people who are supposed to be God's children persist in being apostate, God will judge them. But the true believers among them will not lose their salvation, because Christ has made atonement for them.

From judgment to judgment. Here in Revelation 8:5, we see that the fire-filled censer is cast into the earth before any of the trumpets are blown. With that picture, God is again assuring us that even though He is about to judge the apostate church, every one of His elect has been atoned for by Christ and will surely be saved.

Significantly, this censer does not contain any incense. It means that God is not hearing the prayers coming out from those churches. Those congregations are no longer made up of God's children.

Let's go now to Revelation 16, which also talks about Judgment Day itself. We read in verse 18: "And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth..."

The language there is virtually identical to the second half of this verse, and that is the language God uses to describe Judgment Day. So, God is declaring in verse 5 here that the judgment of the apostate corporate church during the final tribulation period will be followed shortly afterwards by Judgment Day itself.

8:6. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

The seven angels are finally preparing themselves to sound the trumpets. It means that the great, great majority of God's elect have at last become saved. The time has therefore come for Him to begin judging the unfaithful church.

Judgment Against Israel

Before we move ahead further in our study of Revelation, let's pause and review God's dealing with national Israel, because it will enable us to better understand why "judgment must begin at the house of God" (I Peter 4:17), as well as the strange language of the next couple of chapters.

Even before He created the universe, God had developed a salvation plan to save a people for Himself. The names of those whom He had chosen were written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 21:27). That program became operative right after Adam and Eve sinned. That the Lord Himself clothed them with coats of skin strongly suggests that they were saved. Subsequently,

God saved Abel, Enoch, Noah and his family and many others.

But it wasn't until God had called Abraham that He began to set apart a collective body of people as a visible representation of His kingdom. Then, for some 2,100 years, the Bible spoke of the nation of Israel as a congregation of God's people. To set them apart from other peoples, they were given the sign of circumcision.

The invisible church. We must be careful not to confuse this visible representation of God's people with the invisible church of God, which is the kingdom of Christ. As Jesus Himself emphasizes, the kingdom of God "cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20,21). The eternal church of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36); it is made up of all believers throughout time, including Moses and David, as well as those who have just become saved.

Whereas every member of the eternal church is a child of God, not everyone in the corporate congregation is saved. Except during the reign of Kings David and Solomon, in fact, Israel was generally in rebellion against God. Of the people Moses led out of Egypt, most perished in the wilderness. All of that group, Hebrews 3 tells us, died in unbelief; they were unsaved.

Because Solomon engaged in massive idolatry in his latter years, God divided the country into two after his death, with 10 of the 12 tribes forming the northern kingdom of Israel; and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the southern kingdom of Judah. Every king of the northern kingdom did evil in the eyes of the Lord. In 709 BC, God caused its people to be taken captive into Assyria and then dispersed.

While a few of Judah's kings were obedient, most were apostate also. In 587 BC God used the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and the temple and take the people into captivity.

Persistent unbelief. Even during their 70-year exile, God still regarded the Jewish people as the visible representation of His kingdom; and He continued to reveal His will to them through prophets. And after that, He allowed a remnant of them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. But by and large, the people persisted in unbelief and engaged in idolatry. That so angered God that, finally in AD 33, He dismissed Israel as the earthly representative of His kingdom. That was signaled by the rending of the veil of the temple when Christ died on the Cross. The New Testament church then became the temple of God and the corporate representation of His kingdom on earth.

Like ancient Israel, the visible, corporate church, which consists of various denominations and congregations, is not the same as the invisible, eternal church of God. Within every congregation of churchgoers, there are unbelievers as well as true believers.

This distinction between the two can be readily seen in Revelation 2 and 3, where God warned that He would remove the candlesticks of unrepentant churches while reassuring the true believers in those congregations that their salvation is secure. So, when the Bible refers to the church, we need to examine the context to determine whether He has the corporate or the eternal church in view.

Examples for the Church

God also uses the Babylonian conquest of national Israel to prefigure the end-time judgment of the corporate church. We read in Habakkuk 1:6, "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs."

In the historical context, God was warning Israel that the Chaldeans, which is another name for Babylonians, will come and possess their land. But verse 3 of Chapter 2 reads: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Implication: He was talking about developments that will unfold at the end of time. God confirms that in Revelation 18, where He uses the fall of Babylon to represent the fall of Satan's dominion on Judgment Day.

That ancient Israel exemplified the New Testament church is also indicated in I Corinthians 10. In the first four verses God reminds readers that when Moses led ancient Israel out of Egypt, God graciously gave them "spiritual meat" and "spiritual drink" while they were in the wilderness. He then says in verses 5 and 6: "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted."

Lest we forget. In verses 7-10, God recalls the many occasions when the Israelites were guilty of (spiritual) fornication, of tempting or testing God, and of murmuring in discontent, and how they were severely punished as a result. Then He says in verse 11: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

God warns the (corporate) church to remember what He did to ancient Israel in many other passages in the New Testament. He says in Jude 5, for example, "I will therefore put you in remembrance...how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not." And in Hebrews 3:8, "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years."

From the way God judged ancient Israel, therefore, we should be able to gain some insights into the nature of the final tribulation. Indeed, the apostasy that characterizes today's churches parallels that of ancient Israel so closely that we can safely assume that we are now living very close to the end of time. Listed below are some of the striking similarities:

I. Love for False Prophets

As noted earlier, ancient Israel was disobedient during most of its existence. But God was patient with them, giving them many chances to repent. What finally provoked God into bringing judgment to them was that they totally ignored God's Word, putting their trust in false prophets instead. We read in Jeremiah 5:30,31: "A wonderful [or shocking] and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so."

There, God indicted Israel for having committed the shocking act of loving the lies preached by false prophets and priests, rather than seeking God's truth. God added: "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (6:14). Those false prophets played down the consequences of the people's sin-sickness, healing them superficially with assurances of peace, when they were in fact about to be judged by God.

Déjà vu. That very same sin is now prevalent in Christendom. Since the church age began, there have always been denominations and congregations that pervert the gospel of the Bible into some works or grace-plus-works gospels; some have even degenerated into outright cults.

But in the last century or two, the mainline denominations have started preaching a social

gospel that concerned itself mainly with the affairs of this world, denying the gospel of the Bible in the process. They have thereby fulfilled this prophecy of II Peter 2:1: "But there were false prophets also among the people [of ancient Israel], even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

Worse yet, in recent years even evangelical churches have generally ceased to warn people of eternal damnation and Judgment Day. Telling people what their itching ears want to hear, they have been substituting the whole counsel of God with "easy-believism".

Typically, they tell people that God loves them and that Christ has paid for all their sins. Promoting the "benefits" of one being a child of God and promising that God will answer their prayers, they ask people to just invite Jesus into their heart and become saved thereby. There is no call for repentance, no warning of eternal damnation for unbelievers, no mention of submission to the Lordship of Christ. As a result, millions have been misled into believing that they are saved, while all the time they remain under the wrath of God.

II. Blindness of the Congregation

As God began to bring judgment on Israel, He blinded the congregation so that they could not be saved. He told the prophet Isaiah: "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (6:9,10).

This verse is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13 as He explains to the disciples why He speaks in parables – He doesn't want the unsaved, whose hearts are hardened, to understand the spiritual truths that God has prepared for believers. God also said in Isaiah 29:10,11: "For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed."

A similar judgment on the end-time church is prophesied in II Thessalonians 2. After noting that Christ's return will be preceded by a period when the church will have been dominated by false prophets, Paul says in verses 11,12: "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Indeed, there are many churchgoers today who are thoroughly convinced that they are saved, but who nevertheless are actually following gospels other than that which offers salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has so blinded them that they believe a lie, not the truth.

III. Famine of the Word

When Israel was in gross rebellion against God, He issued this warning in Ezekiel 14:13: "Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it."

The staff of bread, as we learned when we studied Revelation 6, has to do with the heavenly bread, the Word of God. The idea of God cutting off spiritual food to His people because of their rebellion is also found in Amos 8. In verse 2, He told the prophet, "The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more." God then explained in verse 11 what He would do: "Behold, the days come,

saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD".

Carrying out that threat, God stopped sending prophets to Israel after Malachi. For 400 years, the people heard nothing from God at all. Then, Jesus came. He publicly denounced the spiritual leaders of that day and, by His death, decommissioned Israel as God's representation on earth.

Abomination. Similarly, as we approach the last day, most churches will be characterized by a famine of hearing the true gospel. In Matthew 24:3, the disciples asked Jesus, "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" He answered: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains..." (vv. 15,16)

About the desolation of the church, Daniel had said: "I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom" (7:21,22). The "horn" there is a picture of Satan; and the "Ancient of days" is God.

What Daniel saw was that, before Christ returns to pronounce judgment for the saints and before the saints possess the new kingdom, there will be a period when Satan makes war and prevails against the saints. It was a vision of the final tribulation period, when false prophets controlled by Satan will have taken over the corporate church; they will be standing in the holy place. People in these congregations, as a result, will no longer hear the true gospel proclaimed.

IV. Rejection by God

Because of Israel's disobedience, God said in Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children."

A similar rejection has been prophesied for the end-time church. God says in Jeremiah 23:19: "Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly."

At first glance, the language seems to relate to ancient Israel. But the phrase "in the latter days" makes it clear that God is really talking about the New Testament church. So, the statement "ye shall consider it perfectly" means that when the Lord directs His anger against the apostate church, true believers will recognize it perfectly.

How is God showing His anger against the church? He says in the last two verses of that chapter: "Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten." He begins to abandon it.

V. Conquest by Babylon

Even back in Deuteronomy 28:49, God warned Israel through Moses: "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young."

The nation that God raised up to finally destroy ancient Israel was Babylon, which itself was later destroyed by God. As we noted earlier,

Babylon is repeatedly pictured in Revelation Chapters 16–18 as a representation of Satan and his dominion. Does this mean that God has also been using Satan to take over the institutional church, and then on the Last Day He will bring judgment on Satan himself? Yes, indeed.

We read in II Thessalonians 2:3, where God is speaking of Christ's return: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

The "man of sin" there is Satan. He is called a man because in Isaiah 14, where God talks about the fall of Lucifer, Satan was identified as "the man that made the earth to tremble" (v. 16). Before Christ finally comes to judge him, he exalts himself in the blinded church, causing misguided churchgoers to worship him without knowing it.

"Fierce countenance". In Daniel 8, God also alludes to the rise of Satan within the end-time church. He said in verses 23: "And in the latter time...when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people."

The only other place in the Bible where the phrase "fierce countenance" appears is Deuteronomy 28:50, which we read earlier. There, God describes Babylon, which would come and destroy ancient Israel, as "a nation of fierce countenance". This "king of fierce countenance" that Daniel speaks of is thus pointing to Satan as well. The devil is now being used by God to destroy the mighty and the holy people; in other words, to overrun the corporate church.

Verse 25 continues, "And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand."

During this period, Satan and his false prophets prosper greatly in destroying souls with their false gospels, their crafty assurance of peace. So confident are they that they even stand up against the Lord Jesus by undermining the commands He has set forth in the Scripture. In the end, though, they will be broken without hand, but by God.

Wolves in sheep's clothing. This king of fierce countenance is said to understand "dark sentences". That phrase is from a Hebrew word that is sometimes translated "dark sayings" elsewhere in the Bible. In Psalm 78:1, for example, God says: "Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old."

We also read in Proverbs 1:5: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings."

What Daniel 8 is warning us, therefore, is that unlike other heretics, the false prophets that take over the corporate church at this end-time period are well versed in the Word of God. They are able to quote and talk about the Bible as well as any true preacher. Why? II Corinthians 11:13-15 explains: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as

the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."

VI. The Tongues Phenomenon

Remember God warned in Deuteronomy 28 that the conqueror will come with a "tongue thou shalt not understand"? He repeated that warning in Jeremiah 5:15, "Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the Lord: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say."

In Isaiah 28:11, God warned again: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear."

All this corresponds with the New Testament warning of Matthew 24:24, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

In fact, right in the context of the tongues phenomenon, God says in I Corinthians 14:21: "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe."

Indeed, more and more churches are being invaded by the phenomenon of tongues. And with hardly any exception, those ministers who advocate the seeking of the "gift" of tongues are also involved with signs and wonders, such as miracle healing, angel visitations, divine messages from visions and so on. By way of contrast, God tells true believers to walk by faith, not by sight.

There can't be any doubt that supernatural signs, wonders and tongues are of Satan, because when God had finished writing the Bible, He said in Revelation 22:18: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." In other words, having put in the Bible all that He wanted to reveal to mankind, God let it be known there that He would no longer bring any message through supernatural means.

The whole Bible. To rationalize their position, many of those who go after signs and wonders say that the phrase "the words of the prophecy of this book" refers only to the Book of Revelation. After all, they say, "prophecy" has to do with predicting the future. But to prophesy really means to declare the Word of God. "The words of the prophecy of this book" thus refer to the words God has declared to us in the Bible.

Moreover, verse 3 of Revelation 1 reads, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." The commands that God wants us to hear and keep appear hardly in Revelation, but mostly in the rest of the Bible.

The Fig Tree Parable

In the Bible, God typically uses figs or the fig tree to represent Israel. In Jeremiah 24, for instance, He likens those exiles who are obedient to "good figs"; and the rebellious ones, "evil figs". Thus, when Jesus cursed a fruitless fig tree shortly after His triumphal entry, He was symbolically pronouncing the end of ancient Israel as the earthly representation of the kingdom of God.

Later, talking about the end of the age, Jesus said in Matthew 24:32,33: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and

putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." Thus, God is again using the fig tree as a time clue for the end of the corporate church age.

Miraculously, national Israel is again a nation among nations; the fig tree is again in leaf. But even after nearly 50 years, well beyond the typical testing period of 40 years, that nation still fails collectively to bear fruit. Having seen this come to pass, we should know that the end is near, even at the doors.

Now in progress. With all these in mind, I am convinced that we have already entered the final tribulation period. In the world at large, sins have multiplied, but people are hardly bothered by it. Meanwhile, to those who truly love the Lord, recent years have surely been most painful, far more so than any prior period of tribulation.

You see, ever since Christ started to build His church, Satan has been attacking it from the outside. Believers have been tortured and martyred. But such persecutions of Christians have only served to strengthen the church and helped to spread the gospel from one nation to another. But Satan has now been loosed by God for a season. Used by God to judge the church, his false prophets have been highly successful in subverting the church from within. As a result, more and more congregations are being controlled by false believers.

Like Jeremiah, Habakkuk and other prophets who lamented the demise of ancient Israel, we true believers now suffer great anguish as we witness one church after another falling away. Our heart aches when we see so many of our unsaved friends and loved ones being snared by false gospels and deceived into thinking that they are saved.

Thankfully, we can take comfort in the fact that all this is a part of God's plan. He is preparing the church, as well as the world, for Judgment Day. When this trying period is over, Christ will come on the clouds of glory for us and we will then be with Him forevermore.

Lesson 13 for Revelation 8:7-13 ~ ~ "Judgment Upon the Church"¹³

8:7. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

First trumpet. In the second half of Revelation 8, we are going to find many statements about fire coming from above and all kinds of things being burnt up. Many theologians interpret them to mean that the final tribulation will be characterized by a devastating nuclear holocaust. Such a conclusion, implying that the Lord will return at a time when the world is in great turmoil, is at odds with what the Bible declares elsewhere.

In I Thessalonians 5:3, God says, "For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." People would hardly be saying "peace and safety" if a major nuclear war was in progress. This does not mean that there might not be a limited nuclear exchange or two at some point. But the language of the Bible precludes a worldwide nuclear holocaust.

Business as usual. The Lord Jesus Himself says in Luke 17:26-30: "And as it was in the days of Noe [Noah], so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and

¹³ *New Life Digest*, First Quarter 1998. [Original Series – Revelation 8:7-13 "Judgment Begins at the Church", *NLD*, Issue No. 7, 1989.]

destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

In other words, it will be business as usual for the people in the world when Christ returns. That's why He will surprise the unsaved like a thief in the night. As we study these horrible-sounding verses, therefore, we must remember that God is using parabolic language to describe spiritual destruction, not physical catastrophes.

The third part. From this verse through Chapter 9, we will see the phrase "the third part" over and over again – eleven times, to be exact. We cannot begin to understand these passages unless we first find out what that fraction represents. Thankfully, God gives us His definition in the Bible.

Speaking of His salvation program, God promises in Zechariah 13:8,9: "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God."

God clearly uses "the third part" in that context to represent all those whom He had chosen to save. Remember, again, that God is speaking allegorically; this is a symbolic figure. It does not imply in any way that of all the people that have ever lived, one-third will receive salvation. Romans 11:5 states that only "a remnant" – just a small surviving group – will be saved according to the election of grace.

Historical parable. God uses this analogy of one-third for His elect also in II Samuel 8. We read in verse 2 there: "And he [David] smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts."

Here, David is a type of Christ, and the Moabites represent the human race. Note that the one-third David spared were allowed to live not because they were any better than the two-thirds that were put to death. It underscores that we are all sinners saved by grace. And even as the third part became David's servants, we believers are the bondservants of Christ.

While the third part in Zechariah 13 and II Samuel 8 represents the eternal church that comprises God's elect, let me hasten to point out that in the context of Revelation 8 and 9, it refers to the corporate church, the visible representation of the kingdom of God. This is similar to the way the Bible uses the name Israel: sometimes it denotes the Israel of God, the invisible church made up of believers throughout the ages; while some other times it refers to the nation of Israel, which before the cross had been the corporate representation of the kingdom of God.

Hail and fire. Hail and fire, as well as blood, are pictures of God's judgment. They were among the plagues that came upon Egypt before the Exodus, and God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by raining upon them brimstone and fire out of heaven.

We also read about hail in Isaiah 28:2, "Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet."

Historically, the mighty and strong one that God had was Assyria, which God later used to overrun the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Spiritually, though, that warning is for the end-

time church. Already, more and more congregations are so drunken with pride as to wantonly ignore the commands of God and arbitrarily change the gospel of the Bible.

Trees and green grass. We read in Isaiah 60:13, "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious." In that verse, God used various trees to signify that believers would come from various nations to glorify Him.

Significantly, whereas this verse declares that one-third of all trees and all green grass will be burnt up, just ten verses later, in Revelation 9:4, we read, "It was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads."

By this seeming contradiction, God underscores that He is using "the third part" in these passages to typify the institutional church upon which He is bringing judgment in the final tribulation period. The trees and the grass of the earth that are not to be harmed represent true believers – those who have the seal of God on their foreheads.

8:8. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood.

Second trumpet. As we've learned before, mountain in the Bible is often a synonym for kingdom. More often than not, in fact, it symbolizes the kingdom of God. Here, we see the earthly representation of that kingdom being cast into the sea, which, as we've also seen before, is a figure for the peoples of this earth. In short, God is casting the corporate church to the unsaved.

This church, which is also pictured by the third part of the sea, becomes blood because it is now being judged.

8:9. And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

Fish, of course, are the most prominent creatures in the sea. And God often typifies believers as fish. Remember Jesus says, "I will make you fishers of men"?

Sometimes, to be sure, God uses fish to represent mankind in general. We read in Habakkuk 1:14, for example: "And [God] maketh men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?" But here, the added phrase "and had life" makes it clear that the church is in view. Spiritually, only believers have life.

God also uses a ship to represent the church. Noah and his family, for instance, were saved from the flood by an ark, which was a huge ship. And in the four gospels, we often read about the disciples entering into a ship. Typically, in those historical parables, the ship represents the body of believers into which we enter when we become saved. The church is our haven against the stormy sea.

But now, because the church is no longer faithful to the Word of God, the third part of the sea creatures died and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

8:10. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters.

Third trumpet. We read in Revelation 9:1, "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit." As we shall see when we get to that verse, Jesus is the star that is given the key of the bottomless pit with which He opens to let Satan out.

The great star in this verse is therefore also the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes down from heaven

burning as a lamp – burning not to bring light, but to bring judgment.

Rivers and fountains of waters are again normally identified with the church that sends forth the gospel. In John 7:38, Jesus says, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." And Revelation 7:17 reads, "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters."

Thus, Christ is saying over and over again that before He judges the world on the Last Day, He first brings judgment upon the corporate church for its apostasy.

8:11. And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

God now gives us a hint of the nature of that judgment. Wormwood is a plant in the hemlock family that is bitter and poisonous. It is used in the Bible to signify something that is altogether deadly.

The star, we have just learned, is Christ Himself. As He judges the church, He lets people of the apostate congregations drink poison waters – that is, He will let them believe in gospels that resemble the real one but do not really bring salvation. We read in II Thessalonians 2:11, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." God actually deludes them so that they believe a lie.

But why has God sent these people this delusion? The answer is found in the preceding two verses in II Thessalonians 2: "Even him [the Lord Jesus Christ], whose coming is after [or against] the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

Because they do not love the whole truth set forth in the Bible, He allows them to be deceived by Satan. This is why, as we will see in Revelation 9, Christ lets Satan out of the bottomless pit.

Warnings of wormwood. Back in Deuteronomy 29, when Moses exhorted the Israelites in his parting address to be obedient, he warned them not to turn from God and worship other gods. He said in verse 18, "Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood."

As it turned out, of course, that nation did eventually engage in spiritual idolatry. They listened to false prophets who told them lies rather than the true Word of God. We then read in Jeremiah 23:15, "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land."

Carrying out His judgment in 709 BC just as He had warned, God used Assyria to overtake Israel. Actually, Jeremiah 23 is meant primarily for the end-time church because verse 20 reads, "The anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly." The term "latter days" in the Bible always refers to the New Testament period.

Bitter waters. A further commentary on wormwood appears in Proverbs 5. We read in verse 3, "For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil." Ostensibly, it advises young men not to listen to

the sweet talk of a harlot. But spiritually, the strange woman typifies false prophets.

Both honey and oil are identified with the gospel. God described Canaan as a land of milk and honey; and oil represents the anointing of the Holy Spirit. So, this verse declares that false prophets do come with gospels that sound just as sweet and smooth as the true one. But the next two verses warn: "But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell." Meaning: These false prophets are, in fact, bringing poison, causing their followers to go down to hell in the end.

So, we begin to see that God will judge the end-time corporate church by letting it be taken over by Satan's wolf-in-sheep-clothing ministers. They will bring gospels that much resemble the true salvation message but are nevertheless counterfeits. Hence, it says here in Revelation 8:11, many men die of the waters because they were made bitter.

8:12. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

Fourth trumpet. As I noted before, the "sun" is a picture of Christ; and the "moon", the law of God. In this context, the latter represents the whole Word of God. Thus, in the final tribulation period, the doctrines that Christ teaches will be smitten and the Word of God will no longer be faithfully proclaimed in the church.

Even as Christ is the "star", believers are pictured as "stars". In Genesis 26:4, God promised Abraham, "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." We also read in Daniel 12:3, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Those who are wise and who help bring others to righteousness are, of course, believers.

Day and night. The "day" is also a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Psalm 118:22-24: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." In that context, the day, as well as the stone, is representative of Jesus. We rejoice and are glad because we are in Christ. The church is also identified with Christ.

So, just as the third part of the sun was smitten, the day shone not for a third part of it. The corporate church is no longer sending forth the true gospel.

It says here, "and the night likewise." We read in Genesis 1:16,17, "He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth." You see, believers are to give light in the night upon this dark world. But now, the people remaining in the apostate congregations are mostly unbelievers; they are darkened likewise.

8:13. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

This chapter begins, you may recall, with the opening of the seventh seal. At that time, the apostle John saw seven angels ready to blow their seven trumpets. We learned that the **last trumpet** represents Judgment Day (see Rev. 11:15). So the first six relate to events leading up to Judgment Day.

In this half of Revelation 8, the first four angels have blown their trumpets. We saw that they all have to do with God's judgment on the

corporate church. The number four in the Bible typically means universality. Thus, the judgment on the institutional church is worldwide in nature.

That God will first judge His own house for its disobedience is written in I Peter 4:17: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God; and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" It is a demonstration of God's holy justice. Before He sends sinners to hell on Judgment Day, He must first punish those representatives of His who have disobeyed His Word.

Exhausted its usefulness. Moreover, with virtually all of God's elect having become saved, the era of God using the corporate church as His evangelistic instrument has come to an end. In these final days, God is using individual believers and isolated congregations and non-church ministries that remain faithful to His Word to bring the gospel to the remainder of His people.

The period when God judges the church is described in Matthew 24:21 as a time of "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be". That's because never in the history of the world was there a time when believers had to endure the anguish of helplessly watching churches all over the world being taken over by false prophets; and never before was there so little hope left for their yet unsaved loved ones to come to Christ. This kind of anguish and tribulation can only be experienced by the true child of God; it is far more painful to the inner soul than any physical torment can inflict.

Three Woes. Now, God is widening His judgment. It is going to impact the whole world. And so, an angel cries out in a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth." There are yet three more trumpet blasts to come. The number three signifies that, horrible though they will be, these woes will serve the purpose of God.

In Chapter 9, we will find that the first two woes take place during the final tribulation period. Only the third woe represents Judgment Day. Then, as Revelation 10:7 puts it, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound [his trumpet], the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." When God finally judges the world, believers will receive their glorified bodies and their salvation will at last be consummated.

Revelation 9

*Lesson 14 for Revelation 9:1-12 ~ "Satan Loosed on Earth"*¹⁴

9:1. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

Fifth trumpet. In the closing verse of Chapter 8, you may recall, the Apostle John heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" Inasmuch as the sounding of the last three trumpets will bring woes to "the inhabitants of the earth", that proclamation effectually reiterates that the four trumpets described in Chapter 8 had to do with judgment against the apostate church. Often spoken of as the final tribulation period, this judgment is prefigured in the Old Testament by God delivering Ancient Israel into the hands of the Babylonians.

Having begun His judgment at the house of God as it must (I Peter 4:17), God is beginning to bring judgment against the unsaved people of the world. Like the first four trumpets, the fifth and sixth trumpets depict in parabolic language events that would unfold toward the end of time. This would correspond to the final tribulation period for the church. It is the sounding of the seventh trumpet that ushers in Judgment Day itself.

Satan, who has been loosed a little season, is again being used by God to carry out the punishments associated with the fifth and the sixth trumpets. But just as Babylon in the Old Testament was ultimately destroyed by God, Satan himself will be cast into hell when the last trump is blown.

The Living Star. As we've learned from Revelation 8:10, the star that falls from heaven is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He "falls" from heaven in the sense that he descends from the lofty heaven above. The term "bottomless pit", as we will see when we come to Chapter 20, is the place or position into which Satan, after having been defeated by Christ at the cross, was cast. It is associated with hell, although it is not hell itself. Like all the unsaved, Satan will not be cast into hell until Judgment Day.

We read about the binding of Satan in Jude 6: "And the angels which kept not their first estate [that is, who did not keep their original position], but left their own habitation [deserted their home in heaven], he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

So, the "bottomless pit" is technically an interim state to which the defeated Satan has been consigned. In that condition, his ability to prevent people from following Christ is markedly reduced. Having vanquished Satan by His death and resurrection, Christ is thus the one who put the devil under "everlasting chains". By the same token, He is the only one who has been given the key of the bottomless pit.

9:2. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

In Genesis 19:23-26, we read about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and about Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt. We then read in the next two verses: "Abraham gat [got] up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."

This smoke from the pit thus has to do with God's wrath. Even as God consigned Satan to the bottomless pit when He began evangelizing the world, so He put His wrath against mankind on hold during much of the New Testament period. As I Peter 3:7 puts it, "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

But now, the time has at last come for God to begin showing His wrath. So, Christ opens the bottomless pit, releasing the devil therefrom so that he can once again deceive the nations and bind the hearts of unsaved men.

Darkened sun and air. The darkened sun is another picture of the gospel being suppressed. Christ is the sun and the light, and that light is now being dimmed.

What does the darkened air picture? In Ephesians 2:2, Paul writes: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." That statement describes Satan as the prince of the power of the air.

Speaking to those who have become saved, Paul writes in Colossians 1:13, "[God] hath

¹⁴ *New Life Digest*, Second Quarter 1998.

[Original Series – Revelation 9:1-12 "Unto the Earth, the First Woe", *NLD*, Issue No. 1, 1990.]

delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (The word "power" there means dominion or authority.)

We can infer from these two verses that the kingdom of the air, of which Satan is the prince, is the dominion of darkness to which every unsaved person belongs. It is the sin-cursed world at large. This verse is thus saying that even the dark, unsaved world is getting darker still. With Satan being loosed, sin is multiplying everywhere.

Prophecy fulfilled. Indeed, this is precisely what is happening in our day. Until just a few decades ago, for example, most of the civilized world, including countries that had hardly any Christian influence, had maintained at least a certain measure of moral standard. People lived according to their conscience.

For example, believers and unbelievers alike honored the marriage institution and frowned upon divorces, unmarried men and women living together and perverted life-styles. Even among heathens, motherly love was something that could be taken for granted.

Today, the marriage institution is in shambles. Fornication is not only widely condoned, but is glamorized by Hollywood and the media. Homosexuals flaunt their sinful life-styles, and people of all persuasions are obsessed with materialism and self-adoration. Worse of all, millions of unborn babies are being murdered every year by accredited doctors at the request of their own mothers!

The second half of Romans 1 has long prophesied this. Verse 18 there begins: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." We then read in verses 24 to 28:

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient [that is, not proper].

Yes, God has begun to give mankind up. He is preparing the world for the Final Judgment Day.

9:3. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

Locusts in the Bible also represent God's judgment. One of the ten plagues that came upon Egypt before God brought the Israelites out, for example, was that of locusts. They devoured everything that was growing in the fields.

In Nahum 3, God also uses locusts to typify His judgment. Because the northern nation of Israel had become very apostate, God let it fall into the hands of the Assyrians. But then, through the prophet Nahum, He prophesied that He would in turn destroy the Assyrian empire in general, and its chief city Nineveh in particular. We read in verses 15-17: "There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts. Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven:

the cankerworm spoileth, and flieth away. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are."

Like the Assyrians, Satan is now being used by God to carry out His judgment upon the unsaved world. And those who are serving the devil to corrupt the world are typified in Revelation 9:3 here by the locusts that came out of the smoke.

Scorpions. What do the scorpions stand for? In Luke 10, when Jesus sends the seventy out, He says, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (vv. 18,19).

Scorpions, as well as serpents, thus represent Satan and the demons that work for him. With God preparing the unbelieving world for Judgment Day, people serving Satan are now given the same destructive power as that given to the devil and the demons.

9:4. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

As we saw when we studied Chapter 8 verse 4, the grass, the green things and the trees are all pictures of the children of God. This is further confirmed by the second half of the verse. Having "the seal of God" on the forehead means belonging to God. Satan is commanded not to hurt them.

This doesn't mean that Christians will not be affected. During the final tribulation period, in fact, they will experience exceptional anguish and heartaches as they helplessly see their congregations turning apostate and their unsaved loved ones remaining unsaved. But their own salvation is secured in Christ; they will not be deceived by false prophets.

Godly living. Moreover, the multiplying of sins brought about by Satan and his emissaries cannot directly hurt truly born-again believers because all children of God have an ongoing desire to do the will of God. They sincerely want to live a life that is pleasing to God.

For that reason and with the help of Christ, they are better able to resist the temptation to engage in adultery, fornication, perversion, abortion, addiction to drugs, drunkenness and all the other sins that are so popular nowadays. Without committing these sins, they will not have to suffer the consequences thereof.

9:5. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.

Nor will Satan's authority over the unsaved be absolute. He is not permitted to kill them. Under God's plan, Christ will come at a time when the world will seem to enjoy an unusual measure of peace. We read in I Thessalonians 5:2,3: "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them."

Indeed, people have lately begun to say, "Peace and safety." For the first time in history, the major nations of the world are no longer building up their armaments. With the collapse of Communist Russia, only the United States can now be regarded as a super military power and for any number of reasons, this country has been aggressively cutting back on major weapons.

Five months. The five months in this verse here, like most other figures in Revelation, should be understood metaphorically. The actual duration of the final tribulation, which I'll discuss later in greater detail, will be quite a bit

longer. This five-month period ties back to the flood of Noah's day. According to Genesis 7:11, it was on the seventeenth day of the second month when all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and when the windows of heaven were opened. We then read in verses 3 and 4 of Chapter 8: "And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat".

A significant characteristic of that particular demonstration of God's wrath, which lasted five months to the day, is that it was worldwide in scope. With the symbol of five months, therefore, God is telling us that this end-time judgment will be worldwide in nature as well. Already we can see clearly that the moral decay that I mentioned earlier is a worldwide phenomenon. So is the falling away of the church.

Tormented. If it is going to be business as usual for the world when Christ returns, how then are the unsaved being tormented? And since the unregenerated love their sins, aren't they having a grand time?

Yes, people will be "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" (Matt. 24:38). Nevertheless, while sinning may seem pleasurable at the time, its consequences even on this earth are typically painful.

For example, homosexuals and those engaged in other sexual perversion are currently suffering from the deadly disease, AIDS. Just recently, it was revealed that its proliferation all over the world has been twice as rapid as it had been previously thought. Likewise, fornication and easy divorces have resulted in innumerable broken families, with the attendant problems literally tormenting both the parents and the children involved. Even unwed mothers and drug users are beginning to discover that they are caught in a living nightmare.

That's why it says here that "their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man." Though the victims hardly feel the sting of sin at first, they will in time be tormented by its full impact.

9:6. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

The people of the world say, "Let's eat, drink and be merry today, for tomorrow we'll die." They are of the impression that when they die, their existence will just terminate. Those suffering from the dire consequences of sin also wish that when death comes, all their miseries will cease.

But physical death will not be the end of their being. On the last day, all those who have died in sin will find themselves raised and standing before the judgment throne of Christ and they will be judged according to what they have done. Found guilty of all kinds of sins, they will then be sentenced to spend eternity in hell.

Hell is not annihilation. Revelation 14:11 says, "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

Yes, many nowadays think that at the moment they die, it will be the end of their existence. But they shall seek but shall not find that kind of death. It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, and each unsaved person will have to give an account of himself to God.

9:7. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

In the Book of Revelation, horses are typically associated with spiritual warfare. Remember the four horsemen of Revelation 6? The first rider was riding on a white horse. We learned then that he is a picture of Christ going forth with the gospel. And the second rider, who sat on a red horse and to whom was given power to take peace from the earth, is a picture of Satan trying to frustrate God's salvation plan.

Later on in Revelation 19, we'll see Jesus coming on the clouds of glory at the Last Day. Describing that moment, John writes in verse 11, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war." This verse is thus saying that Satan and his workers are prepared to wage a spiritual battle.

Masquerade. It says here that the locusts have crowns like gold and their faces are as the faces of men. Back in Revelation 4:4, we saw that the four and twenty elders, which represent all believers, also had on their heads crowns of gold.

So, this verse is further teaching that Satan will not be coming with a forked tail and a red suit. His workers are people disguised as ministers of God. Hence, those who are snared by their false preaching and false religions will think that they are worshipping God, even though they will actually be worshipping Satan.

9:8. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

In I Corinthians 11, God declares, "the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man" (v. 3). Also, "every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head" (v. 5), and "if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering" (v. 15). In short, women have been given long hair to show that they are under the headship of man.

On the other hand, verse 7 declares, "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God"; and verse 14, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" Notice that although the locusts have faces of men, they had the hair of women. Meaning: these false prophets are not at all the image and glory of God; they do not recognize the headship of Christ.

Teeth of lions. Further exposing their true colors are their "teeth of lions". To understand that, let's go to Psalm 58, where God also uses that figure of speech. Showing that every man is sinful at birth, God says in verse 3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." The Psalmist then beseeches the Lord in verse 6, "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord."

Thus, the Bible speaks of the wicked as having the teeth of lions, even as these locusts have the teeth of lions. In other words, although the locusts look like true ministers of God, they are coming to devour their unsuspecting followers.

9:9. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

In the Old Testament, breastplate refers to the vestment worn by the high priest. It was made of fine linen. Its spiritual meaning can be found in the only two places in the New Testament where the word "breastplate" appears. In Ephesians 6:14, believers are told to put on "the breastplate of righteousness"; and in I Thessalonians 5:8, "the breastplate of faith and love".

You see, those who have trusted in Christ put on His robe of righteousness as well as His faith and love. But these locusts have breastplates of

iron. They do not put their trust in Christ; they are not children of God.

Iron, chariots, and horses were all items used in ancient days in warfare. The second half of this verse thus stresses that Satan's followers will be very well equipped; they are eloquent in their preaching and can effectively rationalize their false teaching.

9:10. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

This verse reiterates that the final tribulation will be characterized by widespread emergence of false prophets. That's because in Isaiah 9, God specifically relates tails to false prophets.

In verse 14 there, God says, "Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day." He then explains in verse 15: "The ancient and honourable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail."

In the battle of the final tribulation, Satan's main weapon will be false prophets. Like the stings of scorpions, their teaching and preaching will be poisonous. Remember, this is a worldwide affair. Outside the Christian community, they will use other religions to deceive the nations. This, too, is what we are witnessing today. The new age movement, the eastern mysticism and the Muslim religion have all been flourishing of late, winning converts all over the globe.

9:11. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

We tend to think of an angel as a celestial being that is good. The fact is, not all angels are good. Satan is a fallen angel. Having been released from the bottomless pit, he is now the king ruling over the locusts. He is called the angel of the bottomless pit because not only has he himself been consigned to hell, he is also actively causing others to be similarly consigned.

The Hebrew word *abaddon* is translated "destruction" wherever it appears in the Old Testament. We read in Job 26:6, for instance, "Hell is naked before him, and destruction [*abaddon*] hath no covering." In that context, God is saying that hell cannot hide from God's view. And we read in Psalm 88:11: "Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction [*abaddon*]?" Here, the Bible is saying in effect that only the living give praises to God.

The Greek word *Apollyon*, which appears in the Bible only in this verse, is associated with the Greek word *apollumi*, which is usually translated "destroy" or "perish". Here are two examples:

Matthew 10:28: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy [*apollumi*] both soul and body in hell."

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish [*apollumi*], but have everlasting life."

Thus, Satan's Hebrew name points to his preoccupation with destruction, while his Greek name reveals that it is the kind of destruction that results in eternal damnation in hell.

9:12. One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

One of the last three trumpets has now been blown. So far, God has given us one picture of the destruction that Satan will bring to the world. He will cause sin to multiply; he will deceive people into worshipping him without realizing it.

Two more woes have yet to come. The next one will be a continuation of the same theme. The final woe, though, will be Judgment Day itself.

"The Second Woe Unfolds"¹⁵

9:13. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

Sixth trumpet. In the Old Testament tabernacle, there were two altars. Immediately inside the entrance gate, there was a large altar. We read about it in Exodus 27: "And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass" (vv. 1,2).

That was the altar on which the main sacrifices were offered; it foreshadowed the cross on which the Lord Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself for our sin. Then, inside the tabernacle building and in front of the curtain that screened the Holy of Holies from view was a smaller altar. God spoke of this altar, which was overlaid with gold, in Exodus 30: "And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it. A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about" (vv. 1-3).

Notice that it was upon this altar that the priests were to burn incense. And as we have learned before, incense in the Bible is symbolic of the prayers of believers. Our prayers are a sweet fragrance that rise up to God.

Horns. This altar, as well as the larger one that was covered with brass, had four horns at its four corners. These were not the musical instrument horn, like the trumpet. Made of shittim wood, they were projections that resemble the horns of an animal.

In the Bible horns are used to signify strength, remember? We learned that when we studied Revelation 5:6, where the Lamb was described as having seven horns. As the number four spiritually stands for universality, the four horns of the brazen altar pointed to the power of Christ's sacrifice in atoning for the sins of believers all over the world. That's the power David sang of in II Samuel 22:3: "The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence."

The four horns of the golden altar, on the other hand, represent the power of the prayers that have come before God from saints all over the world. Hence, we see here that the apostle John heard a voice from them.

9:14. Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.

These powerful prayers are asking the angel that has the sixth trumpet to loose the four angels. This ties us back to Revelation 6:9, where, at the opening of the fifth seal, the apostle John saw "the souls of them that were slain". They were crying: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" They were then told to wait "yet for a little season". Now, the time has come for God to begin avenging their blood.

God is also answering the prayers of saints that are still living. In Luke 18 Jesus, using a parable in which a widow persistently asked an unjust judge to avenge her, tells us always to pray and not to faint. He concludes in verse 7, "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night

¹⁵ *New Life Digest*, Third Quarter 1998. [Original Series – Revelation 9:13-21 "The Second Woe Begins", *NLD*, Issue No. 2, 1990.]

unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily."

Four angels. The four angels in this verse are not the same as those spoken of in Revelation 7:1,2. Those angels were standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, and they were told not to act until all of the elect shall have become saved. When we studied those verses, we concluded that the loosing of those angels would correspond with Judgment Day. But that won't come until the seventh angel sounds his trumpet.

The angels being loosed here represent the fallen angels, including Satan himself. God is using them to cause woe to the unsaved of the world, as well as the church that has turned apostate. Note that they have been bound in the great river Euphrates. There are two reasons for this. First, the river Euphrates, which flowed right through the city of Babylon, is identified in the Bible with Babylon. Babylon, of course, is a figure of the kingdom of Satan. Thus, like Satan, these angels have been bound by Christ since the cross.

Also, when God promised Abraham that He would give the land of Canaan to his seed, He said in Genesis 15:18, "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." He subsequently repeated that promise a number of times.

Inasmuch as the land of Canaan is a picture of the kingdom of God, the river Euphrates, bordering that land as it did, symbolically represents the border of the Kingdom of God. That these four angels were bound at the great river Euphrates thus means that they were standing right at the edge of the church, ready to do their terrible work as soon as they were loosed by God.

9:15. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

And now, they are loosed. These angels, it says here, "were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year". This language emphasizes that the final tribulation will be universal in scope (the number four again) and will begin precisely at an appointed time. In fact, every detail of God's salvation plan has been unfolding at the exact moment as it had been ordained before the foundation of the world.

Galatians 4:4,5 points out, for instance, that "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Christ came to earth exactly when the appointed time for His incarnation had arrived.

In this connection, it's highly significant that Christ, the Lamb of God, was crucified on the very day when the Passover was being observed by the Jews – the very day when the priests were killing the Passover lamb in the temple. Passover was the first of the three annual feasts that the Israelites were commanded to observe. Held on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish calendar, it commemorated the day when God took the Israelites out from Egypt; it also pointed to the atonement provided by Christ.

The second was the feast of Pentecost, fifty days later. It was also called the feast of the firstfruits of wheat harvest. Remarkably, it was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit was poured out, starting thereby God's program to evangelize the world. On that very day, some 3,000 people from 18 nations were saved upon hearing the gospel proclaimed by Peter. They were the firstfruits gathered into the kingdom of Christ.

A clue? The third annual feast stipulated by the ceremonial law was the feast of the Ingathering, or the feast of Tabernacles. That was held in the seventh month. This feast celebrated the

ingathering of the harvest in the fall and commemorated the Israelites' successful arrival into the land of Canaan.

Both of those events had important spiritual implications. Christ speaks repeatedly of His return as a harvest day. At that harvest, the tares will be separated from the wheat (Matt. 13:24-30) – the unsaved will be gathered and judged, while the believers will be gathered and brought into the new heaven and new earth.

Considering that the atonement and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit coincided with the first two feasts, I think we have good biblical reasons to expect the Lord to return at a time when the third annual feast is being celebrated by the Jews. In other words, it will be some time in the fall of the year. Obviously, this doesn't tell us what year it might be – in fact, not even what day of the year it might be since the feast of Tabernacles lasts more than a week. At any rate, this verse makes it clear that the final tribulation did begin precisely at its appointed time.

In Revelation 8, God repeatedly uses the term "the third part" to speak of His judgment against the corporate church. But this second woe, according to the last verse of Chapter 8, has to do with judgment upon "the inhabitants of the earth" (8:13). Hence, that term is used here in a slightly different sense. It refers to those huge number of people in the world who are deceived by the apostate church during the final tribulation period into thinking that they have become saved.

9:16. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand; and I heard the number of them.

When we read about an army of horsemen, we immediately think of a battle. When God used Assyria and Babylon to judge Israel and Judah, great armies of horsemen were involved. Nevertheless, we must not fall into the snare of anticipating the end-time battle spoken of by the Bible to be literally fought on some battleground on earth. Prefigured by the judgment of Israel, the final tribulation is a spiritual warfare with Satan fighting against mankind as well as the church.

The fact is, two hundred thousand thousand is two hundred million. No nation in today's world has a standing army of even ten million men. And of them, very few are literally horsemen. So, like most other numbers in Revelation, this 200,000,000 is used by God as a figure of speech.

By its sheer hugeness, for instance, God is telling us that the spiritual assault from Satan's workers during the final tribulation period that we are now in is extremely powerful. In the past, whenever a church or a denomination became heretical, God would raise up a new and more faithful one in its stead. Not so at this end-time. Just before Christ returns, Satan will have corrupted the entire institutional church.

The number two further explains why this deception is so successful. It comes from what appears to be the true church of Christ. The distortion of God's Word is so subtle that even those who know the Bible well are reluctant nowadays to discredit the false prophets. And for fear of being criticized for disrupting "Christian unity", ministers who are otherwise faithful to the word are unwittingly lending their support to Satan's workers of iniquity.

9:17. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone; and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

In this verse, the number three is being featured: they have "breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone", and "out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone." The number

three in the Bible, if it carries any spiritual meaning, signifies the purpose of God. Often, it stresses that the event in question, though it may appear highly negative, is nevertheless in full accord with God's will.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, for instance, Christ prayed three times, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." As it turned out, it served God's purpose that Jesus did drink the cup of God's wrath the next day by going to the cross.

Similarly, it was God's purpose that Peter denied Christ three times. Those denials reflected the helpless state of the church when it was without its head. Jesus had surrendered Himself to the power of darkness.

Here, God is reassuring us that Satan's success in deceiving so many people in this end-time period is completely in accord with His purpose. God has not lost control over events; rather, He is letting the devil take over the church, using it to mislead people onto the broad way to death.

That judgment is indeed in view is indicated by the words "fire", "brimstone" and "smoke" in this verse. When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, the Bible records, God rained down fire and brimstone upon them and the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

Jacinth. Revelation 21:20 is the only other place in the Bible where the word "jacinth" is found. There, this precious stone is said to be one of the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. Jacinth is thus directly identified with true believers and the kingdom of God.

That these horsemen have breastplates of jacinth underscores once more that Satan will come as an angel of light, and that the gospels offered by his pseudo christ's will closely resemble the true one. The same warning is given by the statement, "the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions". Jesus, of course, is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. These false prophets, though working for Satan, will look much like true servants of Christ.

9:18. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.

Will one-third of mankind really be killed during the final tribulation period? No. Otherwise, the Bible would be contradicting itself.

Earlier in this chapter, when the Lord opened the bottomless pit and let Satan loose, the locusts, a representation of Satan and his workers, were commanded not to harm believers, "but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads". So, these woes are not directed at Christians. Nor will a third of unbelievers be literally killed. Elsewhere, the Bible states that the end will come at a time when people are saying "Peace and safety".

Rather, this verse is saying that during these end-time days the false prophets are ensuring eternal death to the gullible who think they are saved. God warns of this in II Thessalonians 2: "Even him [the Lord Jesus Christ], whose coming is after [or against] the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (vv. 9-12).

9:19. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.

The Greek word translated "power" here is *exousia*; it means authority. As we learned when we studied verse 10, God uses the figure tails to picture "the prophet that teacheth lies" (Isa. 9:15).

So, this verse reiterates that when Satan is loosed, he will victimize the unsaved by using false prophets that speak so authoritatively that they sound much like true ministers of righteousness. They will be successful "for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads." Even as the head of the true church is Christ, the head of these false prophets is Satan. And they will be using the devil's tactics.

When the first serpent appeared in the Garden of Eden, it deceived Eve by causing her to doubt the Word of God. "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1), it said to Eve. And it tempted her by appealing to her self-interest, saying, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (v. 5).

Falling away. Increasingly, we are having that kind of deception in today's churches. How often we hear seemingly righteous ministers saying, "Has the Bible really said that women cannot teach and have authority over men?" Or "Has God really forbid divorces of any kind?" Or "Seek the gift of tongues; once you are baptized by the Holy Spirit, you will have supernatural power to gain health and prosperity."

The last phrase says, "with them they do hurt." Yes, with these deceptions, the false christians are indeed hurting a lot of people. The growth of their churches is the success story of the day; their denominations widely praised for their effective evangelistic programs. But all the time, they are hurting the unsuspecting. Like the false prophets of Jeremiah's day, they are telling people that they have peace with God when there is no peace.

9:20. And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:

By no means will all the unsaved be deceived into joining the false churches and becoming pseudo Christians. A huge proportion will continue to follow other religions, including atheism. And they remain unrepentant. By itself, repentance does not bring salvation. Judas repented, but it's clear from the Bible that he was never saved. Repentance nevertheless is a vital evidence of one's salvation. Otherwise, there can be no saving faith.

This verse is thus saying that during this period of the second woe, the non-elect of the world, whether or not they are deceived by the false prophets, will remain unsaved. For them, the day of salvation has passed.

Idolatry. These unsaved will persist in worshipping devils and idols. In the Bible, God again and again equates the religions of the unsaved with idol worship. Psalm 115 is one example. Speaking first of Jehovah God, verse 3 declares, "our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

Then, it goes on to talk about the heathen religions in verses 4-8: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them."

You see, when we are not worshipping the God of the Bible, the only living God, we are engaging in idolatry, regardless of what our religion is. And Psalm 115 further warns that if we are unsaved, we are just like those man-made idols – we are dead, spiritually dead, that is.

9:21. Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

Idolatry is more than bowing to man-made idols and having other religions. We read in Colossians 3:5: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." In citing four categories of sins, this verse again reminds us that the spiritual and moral decay toward the end of time will be universal in nature.

Spiritually, the unsaved will persist (1) in their **murders** because they will be serving Satan who was a murderer from the beginning; (2) in **sorceries** because they will increasingly get involved with signs and wonders; (3) in **fornication** because they will keep flirting with pagan religions; and (4) in **thefts** because they will be turning the house of God into a den of thieves.

During this period, moral decay also spreads all over the world. Using drugs, many people are effectively engaging in sorceries. Fornication and adultery have become the standard of behavior. And thefts and robberies are committed in high places.

But have we really come to a day when a great number of people do not repent of their murders? Yes! For the first time in the history of mankind, millions of mothers, doctors, nurses and others have been murdering unborn babies without any second thoughts.

Yes, we are well into the final tribulation and are much closer to the end of time than most people realize.

Revelation 10

*Lesson 16 for Revelation 10:1-11 ~ "The Little Book in God's Hand"*¹⁶

Back in Revelation 5, we were introduced to the scroll that only the Lord Jesus is worthy to open. It has seven seals. The first six were opened in Chapter 6 and the seventh, in Chapter 8. Thus, Chapter 7 was an interlude between the sixth and the seventh seals. In that interlude, God talked about the 144,000 that He would save before Judgment Day comes. Those 144,000, we learned, are a picture of the entire body of believers.

The seventh seal, in turn, is subdivided into seven trumpets. We have gone through the sounding of the first six in Chapters 8 and 9. But the **last trumpet**, which will signal Judgment Day itself, won't be blown until verse 15 of Chapter 11. So, we are now entering yet another interlude.

10:1. And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

By now, you probably know quite well that the Greek word that is translated "angel" can be correctly translated "messenger" as well. If so, you no doubt know also that this mighty messenger is none other than Christ Himself. Reason: Only He can answer to the description given here.

Note that this mighty messenger is clothed with a **cloud**, He has a **rainbow** upon His head, and His face shines like the **sun**. When we studied Revelation 1:7, we learned that "Christ coming with a cloud" is a picture of His coming with judgment. We'll see that picture in much sharper focus when we get to verse 14 of Chapter 14.

Also, when we studied Revelation 4:3, we found that the rainbow is a sign of the everlasting covenant that God has made with man. It also

symbolizes the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is a bridge between God and man. Finally, we saw back in Revelation 1:16 that Christ is described as having a countenance as "the sun shineth in his strength". And when Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration, His face shone like the sun.

Pillars of fire. Fire normally has to do with judgment – Judgment Day in particular. But back in Exodus 13:21, where God was talking about His ever-presence with the Israelites, we read, "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light."

So, by noting also that the feet of the mighty messenger were like pillars of fire, this verse is starting Chapter 10 off by presenting Christ both as the Mighty One who will come to judge the world and as the Mighty Savior who leads the way for His people and gives them the light of eternal life.

10:2. And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,

The term "little book" here is from the Greek word *bibliaridion*, which is found four times in this chapter of the Bible and this chapter only. It is a diminutive of *biblion*, which means book, and is therefore properly translated "little book".

More often than not, God uses the word *biblion* to refer to the Bible. By using *bibliaridion* in this particular chapter, therefore, God is emphasizing that what's written in this little book represents but a very tiny part of the whole Word of God, and that it involves events in connection with Judgment Day. That this little book is in Christ's hand tells us that all the events written therein will unfold exactly in accordance with His will. (See commentary on Revelation 1:16 regarding the symbolism of "hand".)

But didn't Jesus say in Mark 13:32, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father"? At first glance, it does seem that even Christ does not know when Judgment Day will be. But that cannot be. The Lord Jesus is eternal God Himself; He knows the end from the beginning. Revelation 10:2 is just one of many, many Scriptures declaring that Christ is in full control of all the events leading to, and including, Judgment Day. Since the Bible never contradicts itself, we need to re-examine Mark 13:32 to see what God really has in view.

Actually, "the day" or "the day of the Lord" is typically used in the Bible to identify the event of Judgment Day, not its timing. The word "hour" is sometimes used in that sense as well. Thus, Revelation 18 repeatedly speaks of Babylon, a picture of Satan's world, being destroyed in one hour.

Moreover, the word "knoweth" or know, which often means having the knowledge of, can also mean having a close relationship with. For example, I John 2:3 reads, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." The second "know" there has to do with having a personal relationship with Christ.

So, Jesus was simply saying in Mark 13:32 that no one had **experienced** Judgment Day and therefore knew what it would be like. Before the cross, even He Himself didn't know. The Father knew because He was the one to pour out His wrath.

The victor. Another widely misinterpreted verse clarified by Revelation 10:2 is Zechariah 14:4, which reads: "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."

¹⁶ *New Life Digest*, Fourth Quarter 1998. [Original Series – Revelation 10:1-11 "The Little Book in God's Hand", *NLD*, Issue No. 3, 1990.]

Reading that passage, many theologians teach that the Lord Jesus will someday descend on the mount of Olives as a human king. He will then go into Jerusalem and reign there 1,000 years. But of the same event, this verse says that Christ will set His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the earth. How can God, coming again as a human being, physically set one foot on the sea and another on the earth?

In the Bible, actually, a person standing on something is a picture of a conqueror having vanquished the foe; he is standing with his foot on the neck of the enemy. Thus, the Bible speaks elsewhere of Satan being trodden under foot.

Judgment. This picture is well illustrated in Micah 1. We read in verses 3-5 there: "For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel." The last statement there makes it clear that God was warning the nation of Israel of judgment to come because of their sins.

Thus, Zechariah 14:4 is really talking about the final tribulation. When Christ comes to judge the apostate corporate church, pictured by the Mount of Olives. (See commentaries on Revelation 6:14 and 1:12 regarding "mountain" and "olives".) It "shall cleave in the midst thereof" because truly born-again believers will be distinctly separated from the professed Christians.

Likewise, here in Revelation 10:2, Christ setting His right foot upon the sea and His left foot on the earth is a picture prophesying His coming to judge the world. As we learned when we studied Revelation 7:1, God sometimes uses the sea to symbolize the people of the earth.

10:3. And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

This verse further underscores that Judgment Day is in view. A lion roars when it goes after its prey. Satan, for example, is spoken of in I Peter 5:8 as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. But come Judgment Day, Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, will be the one who goes after His prey.

When God speaks, He thunders. We read in Job 37:2-5: "Hear attentively the noise of his voice, and the sound that goeth out of his mouth. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth: he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he will not stay them when his voice is heard. God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend."

The phrase "seven thunders" points to the perfection of the judgment that God will pronounce. All that which is written in this little book will be carried out in perfect justice.

10:4. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

Why is John told to seal up those things and write them not? A helpful clue can be found in the Book of Daniel, which also deals much with the final tribulation and Judgment Day. After God had shown Daniel a vision of the end of time, for example, He said to the prophet, "The vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days" (8:26).

You see, not only has God hidden the gospel from unbelievers, He also follows a precise timetable as to when He opens up the meaning of His end-time prophecies to believers. Thus,

Daniel wrote in verse 27: "And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it." Even though he recorded it in the Bible, Daniel himself couldn't understand any part of it. In Chapter 12, God again said, "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end" (v. 4). He added in that same verse, "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

What God is saying in Daniel 12 and here in Revelation 10:4 is that until "the time of the end" draws near, the meaning of these prophecies will be hidden from believers as well as unbelievers. That's why so many commentaries of end-time prophecies have proved to be more fiction than truth. But when that period finally approaches, God will open up the meaning to His people. Then, as believers search through the Bible back and forth, comparing Scripture with Scripture, knowledge and understanding of these verses will increase.

As I have pointed out before, we are indeed living near the very end of history. So, if there ever was a time when Christians should diligently examine what the Bible has to say about the final tribulation and Judgment Day, it is now.

10:5,6. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.

Back in Genesis, when God promised Abraham to bless and multiply him, He also took an oath. Hebrews 6:17,18 explains why: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

People typically swear by a higher authority to show that they mean what they say. But God need not do that since He cannot lie. Besides, there is no higher authority by which God can swear. Nevertheless, to give us double assurance that the hope He has set before us is absolutely trustworthy, He took an oath just the same.

Here in Revelation 10:6, God again swears by Himself. This time, He wants us to know in no uncertain terms that this world will not just go on and on and on. At some point, there will be no more time; it will be the last day.

10:7. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

That last day, which will be signaled by the sounding of the seventh trumpet, will bring God's "mystery" to its completion. God uses the word "mystery" in the Bible, as Romans 16:25 puts it, to signify something that had been "kept secret since the world began" but "is made manifest" at the appropriate time. It generally has to do with the gospel, or some aspect of it.

Mysteries. Among the truths that the Bible has specifically labeled as mysteries are:

1. God had chosen believers in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-10).
2. God Himself "was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, (and) received up into glory" (I Tim. 3:16).
3. The people of Israel have been blinded in part, and that condition will remain so through the end of time (Rom. 11:25,26).

4. God's salvation plan has always meant to include both Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 3:3-6).

5. All believers, whether physically dead or alive at the time, will receive a glorified body on the Last Day (I Cor. 15:51).

6. Christ is keenly interested in every local church (Rev. 1:20).

7. Babylon is a picture of the dominion of Satan (Rev. 17:5).

Here in Revelation 10:7, the context indicates that the mystery that "should be finished" at the sounding of the **last trumpet** refers to the entire salvation program in general, but the end-time judgment in particular (see Rev. 11:15).

10:8. And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.

Both this verse and verse 2 point out that this little book is open. Meaning: the time has come for the events written therein to unfold. Remember, this little book pertains specifically to the horrible final tribulation period and Judgment Day itself. These are events people both in and out of the church nowadays do not want to hear or talk about. But here, John is specifically commanded to take this little book.

10:9,10. And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

Obediently, John asks the Messenger for that little book. But then, he was told to eat it. That's strange language, isn't it? Remember what Jesus says of Himself in John 6? "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (v. 33), and "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (v. 35).

Jesus, of course, is the Word of God. Once a person is truly saved, he hungers and thirsts for the Word of God. Only by partaking of this heavenly food can he have spiritual growth. Only by abiding in the Word of God can he be obedient to it.

Yes, God's Word is sweet to us. Jeremiah 15:16 puts it this way: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." And the same sentiment is expressed by the Psalmist, who writes, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (119:103,104).

This is not true, of course, with unbelievers. Before we were saved, we had no love for the Bible whatsoever. That's why having a strong and sustained desire to "eat" the Word of God is a key evidence of salvation.

Bitter. But why is it bitter in the belly? The answer can be found in a very similar passage in Ezekiel. Ezekiel was the prophet who prophesied over Israel during the six years before they were destroyed by the Babylonians. As national Israel is a picture of the New Testament corporate church, he was prophesying at a time which spiritually represents the very period Revelation 10 is talking about.

We read in Ezekiel 2:7-10:

And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.

And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

Even though the message he was to bring was ominous – “lamentations, and mourning, and woe” – Ezekiel found it sweet in his mouth. He wrote in verse 3 of Chapter 3, “Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.” Being a true child of God, he delighted in the Word of God.

God went on and told Ezekiel that the nation of Israel would resent the warnings he was to bring them, but promised that He would help him face the Israelites. Then, Ezekiel wrote in verse 14, “and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.” You see, he went in bitterness because he had to bring an ultimatum from God which he knew the people would not heed.

Now, in Revelation 10, God is telling John to issue the same kind of dire warning to the world: Time is running out; God is about to bring His judgment. Like Ezekiel, John finds it sweet to his mouth. But the warning will not be heeded by the stubborn world nor the apostate church. And so, the little book makes John’s belly bitter.

10:11. And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

Notice that God names four groups in this verse – peoples, nations, tongues and kings. The number four signifies universality (see commentary on Revelation 8:13 re the number four). Implication: God wants this message to go out into all the world. The apostle was already very advanced in age when he recorded this vision in Revelation. And being an exile on the island of Patmos, he himself could not possibly carry out the commission. So, this command is really meant for all believers.

In this interlude, then, God is emphasizing to us that we must let the world know that Judgment Day is coming. As we do so, we will offend many. But the fact that most people won’t like to hear what we have to say is immaterial. We must remember Matthew 24:14, where Jesus says: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

Revelation 11

Lesson 17 for Revelation 11:1-10 ~ “The Two Witnesses”

We are still in the interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. The first six trumpets were sounded back in Chapters 8 and 9 and the seventh won’t be blown until verse 15 of this chapter. Before that, God is giving us an overview of the role of the church in the entire New Testament period.

11:1. And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

The Apostle John is told here to measure the temple of God. What temple is this? We read in Ephesians 2:20,21, “[Ye] are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.” The temple is the body of believers.

John is to measure with a reed like unto a rod. A reed is the stem of a tall grass, which was sometimes used in the old days as a measuring tool. While it is usually rather weak and breaks easily, this one is “like unto a rod”. Speaking of Christ judging the nation, Psalm 2:9 declares, “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

On the same subject, Revelation 19:15 says, “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.” The sharp sword that goes out of His mouth, as we’ve previously learned (Rev. 1:16), is the Word of God. So, the Word of God is that which John is to measure the temple with.

When a building is under construction, it is regularly measured to ascertain that every part is fitted together properly. Here, the Apostle John, a representative of all believers in this instance, is told to use the Word of God to ensure that the temple is properly built. In short, we are to make certain that people are brought into the body of Christ by hearing the true gospel, the whole counsel of God.

Notice God says “Rise” as He tells John to do the measuring. Implication: only those who have experienced the resurrection of the soul, those who have been born again, are qualified to carry out the Great Commission.

Altar and worshippers. John is to measure “the altar, and them that worship therein” as well. The altar, of course, is intimately associated with the Lord Jesus Christ; He was the Perfect Sacrifice that was offered.

In this context, though, the altar refers to true believers, to whom God says in Romans 12:1: “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” While many people call themselves Christians, only true believers surrender their lives to Christ and offer their bodies on the altar of service. Likewise, only those who have become saved worship God in truth and in spirit. These are the ones that John is to measure.

Perhaps the most important reason for measuring the temple is to determine when it is finally completed. Christ is faithful in carrying out His promise to save all those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. He will not return to judge the nations until the very last of the elect has become saved.

11:2a. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles.

A commentary of this verse is given in II Chronicles 23. The priest Jehoiada was then preparing the temple for service, and he said in verses 4-6: “This is the thing that ye shall do; A third part of you entering on the sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters of the doors; and a third part shall be at the king’s house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation: and all the people shall be in the courts of the house of the LORD. But let none come into the house of the LORD, save the priests, and they that minister of the Levites; they shall go in, for they are holy.”

In that historical parable, Jehoiada said that only priests and Levites may enter the temple; all the other people were to stay in the courts outside. Spiritually, those priests and the Levites are a picture of believers. As I Peter 2:5 says, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood.” Thus, in the court outside are all the unsaved.

Outsiders. The word “Gentile” in this Revelation verse is better translated “nations”. The last phrase thus reads, “for it [the court which is without] is given unto the nations”. Unbelievers, spoken of as the nations of the world, have been given the court that is outside the temple.

In telling John not to measure the court which is without, but to leave it out, God is effectively declaring that the timing of His return to bring this world to an end is contingent only on the completion of the temple. Just how many unsaved people remain in the courtyard outside is altogether immaterial.

The 70 Weeks of Daniel 9

Before we move on to the second half of verse 2, let’s take a detour to the Old Testament. That’s because later in this verse and also in Revelation 12 and 13, we’ll find numerous mention of 42 months, 1,260 days, or three and a half years. As the Bible typically considers a year to have 12 months and a month to have 30 days, those periods seem synonymous. To find out what they represent, we go to the Book of Daniel.

In Daniel 9:24-27, God gives us two time paths leading to the Messiah’s two comings. Both of them involve 70 weeks. (As the Hebrew word “weeks” also means seven, 70 times 7 equals 490 years.) The starting point of both is identified as “the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” in verse 25.

Searching through the Scriptures, we find only two commandments or decrees that had to do with the rebuilding of Jerusalem. (The rebuilding of the wall under Nehemiah’s direction did not involve any command; he merely sought and received permission from King Artaxerxes to do so.)

In 537 BC, King Cyrus of Persia, responding to a command from God, directed the Israelites in Persia to go back and rebuild the temple. Some 50,000 Israelites did return to Jerusalem and lay the foundation of the temple. But 490 years after 537 BC was 47 BC, which did not relate in any way to the coming of the Messiah.

Then in 458 BC, King Artaxerxes commanded Ezra to re-establish the law, to resume offering sacrifices and to resupply the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:12-25). This date is evidently what God has in mind because it works out perfectly.

The Cross. The first path is given in verse 24: “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.” This is a prophecy of the Lord’s first coming. By going to the Cross, He finished the transgression of those whom He had come to save and made an end to their sins. He atoned for their iniquity, thereby reconciling them to God. He also brought in the everlasting righteousness of God. All this sealed up the salvation that the Bible had long prophesied. And after He had resurrected and ascended back to heaven, He was anointed the most Holy – the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

When did Jesus go to the cross? From Luke 3, we know that He was baptized in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar. Since Tiberius began reigning in AD 14, Christ’s baptism thus took place in AD 29. According to the events recorded in the Gospel of John, we also know that the Lord ministered on earth for about three and a half years and that He was crucified on Passover, which was in the spring. That puts the Cross in AD 33, with Christ having been baptized in the fall of AD 29.

From 458 BC to AD 33, there were exactly 490 years (458+33-1 = 490). One is deducted from the sum because there was no year zero between 1 BC and AD 1.

The second coming. The second path, which is a bit more complicated, is given in verses 25 to 27. There, God breaks the 70 weeks into three segments: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks and one week. Verse 25 reads: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto

¹⁷ *New Life Digest*, First Quarter 1999. [Original Series – Revelation 11:1-14 “The Rise and Fall of the Church”, *NLD*, Issue No. 4, 1990.]

the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."

"The Messiah the Prince" is Christ, of course; and the street and the wall that shall be built again refer to the Holy City. The word "troublous" means distressing. Thus, this verse prophesied that Christ would come to rebuild the Holy City at the end of the 69th week, and that it would be a time of great spiritual distress.

But we wonder why God separated the first seven "weeks" (or 49 years) from the 62 "weeks" (434 years) instead of saying 69 weeks outright. Either the first period, or the second, or both, must have some special meaning. Indeed, seven weeks of years is highly significant in the Bible.

Jubilee. In Leviticus 25, God told the nation of Israel in verse 8, "thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years," and then in verse 10, "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you."

Not coincidentally, 457 BC, the year after King Artaxerxes had issued his decree, was a Jubilee year. So was 407 BC, since a Jubilee year comes every 50 years. By setting the first seven weeks apart, God was evidently telling us to begin counting the 62 weeks after these Jubilee years. In other words, that period of 434 (62x7) years would begin in 406 BC. And lo and behold, between 406 B.C and AD 29, the year Christ was baptized, there were exactly 434 years (406+29-1=434)! Thus, the prophecy of verse 25 has been fulfilled.

Stumbling stone. Verse 26a reads: "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary;" Christ the Messiah, of course, was crucified some time after AD 29, and He was cut off not for Himself, but for the sins of those whom He came to save. But who are the people of the Prince? The Jewish people. God says in John 1:11, "He [Jesus] came unto his own, and his own received him not."

And "the city and the sanctuary" that they destroyed was the Lord Jesus. They crucified Him. Of Himself, Christ said in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." So, the prophecy of verse 26a was fulfilled at the cross.

Spiritual warfare. Still prophesying events to unfold after AD 29, verse 26b reads: "...and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined." A flood is a picture of the judgment of God; this is epitomized by the flood of Noah's day. In other words, the rebuilding of the temple of God, the salvation of all of the elect, shall end with Judgment Day.

Meanwhile, a spiritual war goes on between the kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan. And the end of that war will be characterized by the abomination of desolation that Christ warns of in Matthew 24:15. As we have learned from the last few chapters of Revelation, that is the final tribulation period that precedes Judgment Day.

Last "week". Verse 27 brings us to the last of the 70 weeks, the one that began with Christ's baptism in AD 29. The first half of that verse reads: "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease,"

Who is the "he" in this verse? It has to be the Lord Jesus Christ, because in this whole passage the only antecedent for that pronoun is the Messiah, the Prince. Jesus confirmed "the covenant [of grace] with many" by dying on the cross. We read in Matthew 26:27,28: "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the

new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The word "testament" is translated from the same Greek word for the word "covenant".

Significantly, Christ was crucified in the midst of the 70th week – that is, three and a half years after His baptism. And His crucifixion brought an end to the sacrifice and the oblation (that is, offering) that had been required since the day of Abel and Cain. That was the only time in history after which animal sacrifices and burnt offerings have ceased to have any spiritual meaning.

Symbolic. At the moment Jesus died on the cross, you remember, the veil of the temple was rent in two from top to bottom. Meaning: the temple and, for that matter, the nation of Israel were decommissioned by God from being the earthly representation of His kingdom. Thus, the three and a half years during which the Lord ministered on earth corresponded to the final period of the Old Testament church.

As the dismissal of national Israel foreshadows the end of the New Testament corporate church, the last three and a half years of its commission were representative of the final tribulation period of the church. This then is the period to which the 42 months we find here in Revelation 11:2 are pointing to. I'll amplify on this later on.

Another symbol. Meanwhile, going back to Daniel 9, we read in the second half of verse 27: "...and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." This brings us to the end of time.

Because of the increasing falling away of the corporate church, God will allow Satan and his emissaries to make it desolate. This, the final tribulation period, extends right to the end of time, which is also the time when God's salvation plan reaches its consummation. On the last day, Christ will come and pour out the wrath that He had decreed or determined upon the desolate, and the latter includes Satan as well as all the false prophets.

Thus, God is telling us here that the second half of the final "week" is to be taken symbolically to represent the entire period from the Cross to the end of time. By so doing, He is able to give us two 70-week paths leading to two events that are 2,000 years apart even though they both start at 458 BC.

All this underscores the wisdom of God. Whereas the first half of the last "week" of Daniel 9 literally prophesied the three-and-a-half years that Jesus ministered on earth, He uses 42 months to signify the final tribulation period in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5. Then in Revelation 11:3 and 12:6 He equates 1,260 days to the second three and a half years that stands for the whole New Testament era.

11:2b. and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Now, we can better understand why it says here that the unsaved in the court outside will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months. It is a prophecy being fulfilled in our very day. With Satan having been loosed for a season, false prophets and false teachers are now dominating most congregations. They have been casting biblical truths down to the ground.

11:3,4. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

We can also understand that the two witnesses are to prophesy throughout the New Testament period. They obviously cannot be two human beings. Actually, we have previously learned that candlesticks and olive trees, as well as the number two, are all pictures of the church. So, God was proclaiming in this verse that the

church would be given power and authority to send forth the gospel into the world.

The expression "clothed in sackcloth" has to do with mourning or repentance. When Jacob learned that his son Joseph had died, he "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days" (Gen. 37:34). And in Matthew 11:21, Jesus said, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

This phrase thus reaffirms that the two witnesses are indeed the church. It consists of believers who have repented of their sins. And because they mourn for the lost of the world, they witness to them, telling them the Good News of Jesus Christ.

11:5,6. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

As we read this passage, we immediately think of Moses and Elijah. Moses, of course, was the one who had turned the waters in Egypt into blood and brought plague after plague upon the earth just before he took Israel out of that country. And Elijah was the one who called down fire from heaven to destroy his enemies (II Kings 1:10,12) and who prayed that it would not rain during the reign of wicked Ahab, after which the heaven was shut for three and a half years (I Kings 17:1).

But as we noted earlier, the two witnesses cannot be two human beings. And nowhere in the Bible does it teach that believers who have gone to be in glory with Christ would come back to this sin-cursed earth to do additional work. God is thus using Moses and Elijah here symbolically. You see, Elijah is a great representative of the prophets, even as Moses is the great representative of the law.

Specifically, God is speaking here of the power of the gospel, the power of the Word of God to save people. For the Bible to use Moses and Elijah to represent the Word of God is not unique. In Luke 24, where we find the resurrected Christ talking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we read in verse 27, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." So, this verse is effectively saying that as we believers send forth the gospel, we have the full power of the Word of God.

It also says here that "if any man will hurt them [that is, if any man rebel against what the witnesses bring], he must in this manner be killed." In what manner? By the power of the gospel. You see, the living Word of God is a two-edged sword. While it brings salvation to those who respond positively, it also condemns those who reject it. In this regard, Paul writes in II Corinthians 2:16, "To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"

11:7. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

During our study of Revelation 8, you may recall, we took a long detour just before the first trumpet was sounded to review the way God had dealt with Israel when it had turned apostate and to show why He is likely to deal with the church in the same manner. We saw that with nearly all of God's elect having become saved so that the church has substantially served its purpose, it has become increasingly apostate. And even as God used Babylon to judge Israel,

He is now using Satan and his false prophets to judge the church. These truths are summed up neatly in a capsule by this verse.

It says here that when the church (the two witnesses) has finished its task of sending forth the gospel, it will be overcome and killed by the beast, which is a picture of Satan. Again, Satan won't be killing Christians physically. This is parabolic language prophesying the current state of the corporate church. It is so overwhelmed by false prophets that, as far as sending forth the gospel is concerned, it is as good as dead.

11:8. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

As the earthly representation of the kingdom of God, the institutional church is now nothing but a corpse. These spiritually dead congregations, it says here, are lying in the street of the great city where our Lord was crucified. Our Lord was crucified, of course, just outside the city of Jerusalem. Symbolically, Jerusalem is where the body of believers belongs. But now, this great city is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt.

Sodom was one of the four cities destroyed by God in the days of Abraham. Its people were very wicked, notorious for their homosexuality and lasciviousness. Here, the corporate church is called Sodom because it has turned spiritually adulterous.

Significantly, when Israel was apostate, God also called it Sodom. Speaking to the nation of Judah, for example, He said in Ezekiel 16:49, "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy."

Egypt. In the Bible, Egypt is a picture of enslavement. The Israelites were slaves in that country. Their deliverance by the powerful hand of God typifies the liberation of believers from their bondage to sin and Satan. Now, the church is called Egypt because it again is in bondage to sin; it again is ruled by Satan and his emissaries. Masquerading as ministers of righteousness, the latter are successfully deceiving people into worshipping Satan, although the latter think that they are following Christ.

This doesn't mean that there won't be any congregations that remain true to the Word of God. Nor does it mean that individual believers and ministries will not continue to bring the gospel to others. During the final tribulation period, they will be used by God to save the very, very last few of His elect. But churches in general will be bringing gospels other than that of the Bible.

11:9. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves.

Note that God uses four nouns to describe those who see the dead church. As the number four spiritually means universality, He is saying that the current takeover of churches by Satan is a worldwide phenomenon. That's why Jesus said in Luke 18:8, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" The implication of that rhetorical question is that when Christ returns, faith will be a scarce commodity all over the earth.

Ordinarily, when a person dies, he is buried; his decaying body is put out of the way. Likewise, the dead shell of the church should really be buried and put out of sight. But that is not to be the case. Satan wants to flaunt his victory before all people. So, the apostate congregations are highly visible. Offering gospels tailored to appeal to the unsaved, they have been mushrooming all over the globe.

Three and a half days. Does this verse mean that the final tribulation will last only three and a half days? No, if so, we would expect Judgment Day to have come almost immediately after the final tribulation began. Such a conclusion is contrary to what the rest of the Bible declares.

How long will the final tribulation period be, then? Many theologians teach that it will be seven years. They base that on Daniel 9:27, which, as we saw earlier, speaks of the last of the seventy weeks. But as we have just learned, that last week represents the whole period that runs from Christ's baptism to the end of time; it was in the middle of that week that the Lord went to the cross and put an end to blood sacrifice and burnt offerings.

Actually, three and a half days is just one of several numbers the Bible uses to typify the final tribulation period. It ties back in Daniel 7, where in a vision Daniel saw four beasts. The fourth beast, dreadful and terrible and having ten horns, is a picture of Satan when he is loosed. Of that beast, verse 25 says: "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

That passage is describing exactly the same event as Revelation 11. The church is given into Satan's hand. One time plus two times plus half a time (the dividing of time) makes three and a half times. That corresponds to the three days and a half here in Revelation 11.

Incidentally, the changing of times and laws of the Bible is indeed prevalent in Christendom today. More and more congregations have been rewriting the laws of God regarding divorce and the remarriage of divorced persons and regarding the role of women in the church. And in teaching that a 1,000-year golden age still lies ahead, they have pushed back the time of Christ returning in power and glory by 1,000 years.

Seventy years. In the last chapter of II Chronicles, God talks about the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jews by the Babylonians. All that, God explains in verse 21, was "to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years."

Between 609 BC, when Jerusalem was first taken by Egypt, and 539 BC, when the servitude of Israel to Babylon finally ended, there were seventy years. That 70-year captivity, when the land enjoyed her sabbath, is another type of the final tribulation period. Jesus confirms that fact when He says in Matthew 24:20,21: "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

Twenty-three years. Although Judah was subdued by Egypt in 609 BC, it was not totally destroyed until 587 BC. During that interim, all four of its kings were terribly wicked and the country existed under foreign rule. As such, it is also a type of the final tribulation period, with the church existing under Satan's rule. From 609 to 587 BC inclusive, there were 23 years.

Significantly, the number 23 is also featured in I Corinthians 10:8, which makes a reference to the judgment that came upon ancient Israel near the end of their journey in the wilderness. It reads, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand."

That Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to say that 23,000 fell in one day is noteworthy because the Old Testament account of that plague in Numbers 25 shows that altogether 24,000 were killed, presumably over two or more days. That plague, occurring as it did at a time when the nation of Israel stood at the edge of the promised land, was another picture of the

final tribulation. For believers, of course, the final tribulation period will be followed by the consummation of their salvation.

Historical parable. We find the number 23 in yet another historical parable that points to the final tribulation period. In Acts 27, we read that the ship on which the Apostle Paul was taken prisoner to Rome came upon a storm and was shipwrecked. That ship is a picture of the end-time church. But all 276 people on board survived. The number 276 is related to the number 23 in a very unique way. If you add up all the numbers from 1 through 23, you get 276. You get that number also by multiplying 12 by 23. Spiritually, of course, 12 represents the fulness of God's plan, especially as it relates to believers.

So, through that historical parable, God is saying that while the final tribulation period will see the corporate church being destroyed, it will also lead to the completion of God's salvation plan. By the last day, the fulness of God's elect will all have become saved.

When we stop and think about it, we must acknowledge that only the infinitely wise and powerful God could have so arranged historical developments as to have exactly 276 people survive in that particular shipwreck and then have it recorded in the Scriptures!

Abomination of desolation. The number 23 is linked to the final tribulation most directly in Daniel 8. There, it talks about a "little horn" that grew exceeding great. It again is a picture of Satan that has been loosed. About that horn, verse 11 says, "Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily sacrifice was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down." The word "sacrifice" does not appear in the original manuscript and does not really belong here. The "daily" that is taken away refers to the candle that burned daily, or continuously, in the temple. It typifies the light of the gospel, which will be snuffed out by Satan during the final tribulation period.

We next read in verses 13 and 14, "Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." That's 2,300 days.

Eighty-four. So now, we've seen three time periods that are identified with the final tribulation – 70 years, 23 years and 3 1/2 days – with God putting especially heavy emphasis on the number 23. Although these time periods seem to be unrelated, they in fact have something in common. They are all linked to the number 84, which itself is symbolically important.

Eighty-four is the product of 7 times 12. Seven, of course, represents perfection, and 12, as we noted above, represents the fulness of God's plan, especially as it relates to believers. So, 84 really stands for the perfect consummation of God's salvation plan for all those whom God has chosen to save. And the final tribulation is really the beginning of the end of God's program.

But how are those numbers linked to 84? Seventy years have 840 months; three and a half days have 84 hours; and twenty-three years have exactly 8,400 days! (There are five leap years in 23 years. So, 23 years x 365 days + 5 days = 8,395 days + 5 days = 8,400 days.)

This is not just a coincidence. The mathematical odds for all three time periods having a common denominator in 84 are far too great to be accidental. Rather, it shows once more how wisely God has written the Bible to reveal truths to us.

How long? In all likelihood, then, the final tribulation will last 70 years, 23 years, 2,300 days or 3 1/2 days. Since Satan's conquest of

the institutional church will be highly visible worldwide, it will no doubt last much longer than 3 1/2 days. But it is not likely to be as long as 70 or even 23 years. That's because God has mercifully promised that He will shorten that period for the sake of His elect.

We read in Matthew 24:21,22: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

This narrows down to the 2,300 days that we saw earlier in Daniel 8:14, where God answers the question that specifically asked how long would the transgression of desolation be. In fact, the word "days" in that verse was translated from a rarely used Hebrew phrase that literally means "evenings and mornings". By that, I believe, God is stressing that He is not speaking figuratively; He means literal 24-hour days. If so, the final tribulation will last a little less than six and one-third years.

11:10. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

Has the church been tormenting them that dwell on the earth? Have we believers been tormenting the unbelievers around us? Not literally, of course. But the unsaved of the world don't want to hear that they are sinners. They don't want to hear that they are under the wrath of God and, unless they become saved, will have to spend eternity in hell. To the extent that they are upset by these truths, they are tormented by those who bring the gospel.

So, when the church no longer tells them that they are headed for hell, they rejoice. Those who are snared by the sugar-coated gospels in particular rejoice because they believe they have the best of both worlds – salvation as well as the things and pleasures of the world. And they rejoice because the rapid worldwide growth of their churches and denominations has become the success story of the day.

Sending gifts to one another is a common expression of happiness. But in this verse, God may also have spiritual gifts in mind. In II Thessalonians 2:9,10, God warns that when Satan is loosed, false prophets will come "with all power and signs and lying wonders". The signs and lying wonders have to do with supernatural phenomena. Even today, churches that feature signs and wonders are deeply interested in the "gifts" of tongues, of healing, of dreams and visions, and so on.

Lesson 18 for Revelation 11:11-19 ~ "The Last Day"¹⁸

11:11. And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them.

In this verse, the pronouns "them" and "they" again relate to the body of true believers. After the final tribulation period comes the last day, when Christ returns and raises up all those who have died in Christ. As the Spirit of life enters into them, they are resurrected. This is also the day when those believers who are still living on earth are raptured. ("Rapture" is not a biblical word – it is a term ascribed by theologians for this glorious event.)

A somewhat more detailed description of this event appears in Matthew 24. Starting from verse 29, we read: "Immediately after the

tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

The Greek word for "Immediately", *eutheos*, is sometimes translated "by and by" or "shortly". Speaking also about the end of time, for instance, Jesus says in Luke 21:9, "But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by [*eutheos*]." And in his third epistle, John tells Gaius, "I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: But I trust I shall shortly [*eutheos*] see thee, and we shall speak face to face" (vv. 13,14). In any event, this passage in Matthew is teaching that Christ's return will be the next major event that follows the final tribulation.

The first thing God does on that last day is to gather all believers. We read in I Thessalonians 4:15-18: "...we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [meaning precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

As we learned when we studied Revelation 8:2, all this will take place when the **last trumpet** is blown (see Rev. 11:15).

Secret rapture? There are those who teach that when the rapture comes, believers will suddenly disappear, and the unsaved that are left behind will be wondering what has happened. They draw that conclusion from verses 40 and 41 of Matthew 24: "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

It's true that when Christ returns, believers will be raptured, leaving the unsaved behind. But this verse in Revelation 11 makes it clear that the unsaved will know very well what has happened. Great fear will fall upon them. Why? Because they know at last that the time has come for them to stand for judgment.

Remember Revelation 6:16,17? "And [they] said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" They call on the mountains and rocks to fall on them and crush them so that they could escape the wrath of the Lamb. But there can be no escape from Judgment Day. Great fear will fall upon them.

11:12. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

The great voice from heaven, of course, is the voice of God. When He calls believers to come up, they all ascend up to heaven in a cloud. The word "cloud" in the Bible often has to do with the glorious presence of God. We read in Exodus 13:21, "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and night."

And in I Kings 8:10,11: "And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for

the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord."

In Matthew 17, where Jesus was transfigured before the three disciples in an high mountain, we read in verse 5, "While he [Peter] yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."

Judgment. But Christ coming with the clouds has to do with Judgment Day. We will see that vividly when we come to Revelation 14. So, the phrase "they ascended up to heaven in a cloud" implies that they will immediately join the Lord Jesus Christ in judging the world. That also confirms that believers will not be judged on Judgment Day.

True, the Bible does declare in Romans 14:10 and II Corinthians 5:10 that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But the fact is, we did stand for judgment in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ nearly two thousand years ago. He was found guilty with our sins and He paid the penalty in full for us by dying on the cross.

For that reason, when Christ returns, we will at once be given our glorified bodies and will then be caught up in the air to be with Him. There isn't a moment that we stand before the judgment throne; instead, we will be judging the world with Him.

Sheep and goats. But Matthew 25 says that when Christ comes again, He will gather all the people and then separate them into two groups, the sheep on the right and the goats on the left. And verse 34 reads, "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." When will that conversation take place?

It won't. Actually, as evidenced by His classifying people as sheep and goats, Jesus is giving a parable there. Parables are earthly stories with a spiritual or heavenly meaning. They are not to be taken literally. In this story, the King says to the sheep, "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." He then explains, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Conversely, He sends the goats to everlasting punishment because they did not do those things to the least of His brethren.

If we interpret this passage literally, we would end up with a gospel of works. In other words, it would suggest that if we live a charitable life on earth, we would qualify to go to heaven; otherwise, we would be sent to hell. Such a conclusion is altogether contrary to the gospel of grace.

Worse yet, a literal interpretation of this parable would suggest that an unbeliever could claim that he deserves to go to heaven because he did give a drink to a thirsty Christian once. On the other hand, a believer could be sent to hell for having failed to visit a fellow Christian who was ill or in prison. This cannot be, because the Bible clearly teaches that once saved, a believer is always saved.

Ambassadors. What that parable really teaches is that there are two kinds of people on this earth: the sheep, representing the believers; and the goats, the unbelievers. While all of them will be instantly present here on the last day, there won't be a literal conversation between God and them. Rather, God is using the parabolic conversation to show us the kind of people who will go into heaven and the kind of people who have to remain here for judgment.

You see, believers are commissioned by Christ to be His ambassadors on earth. Having been so commissioned, every one of them has the

¹⁸ *New Life Digest*, Second Quarter 1999.

[Original Series – Revelation 11:15-12:17 "The Last Trump – A New Vision", *NLD*, Jan-Mar 1991.]

task of sending the gospel into the world. And that involves giving heavenly bread to the spiritually hungry, giving living water to the spiritually thirsty, inviting strangers into the kingdom of God, clothing the spiritually naked with the robe of Christ's righteousness, going to the spiritually sick with the good news of Christ, and freeing those who are in bondage to sin and Satan from the prison house of death.

So, this parable is teaching that the ones that will go into heaven are those who have been given the Great Commission. The rest of the people of the world will all be sentenced to eternal punishment.

What about those unsaved people who evangelize with great zeal? Indeed, some followers of false gospels seem to be even more enthusiastic than true believers in talking about Christ. God may even use their witnessing to save some of His elect. Nevertheless, they are not legitimate ambassadors of Christ. They have not been commissioned by God. And so, they are still part of the goats that shall go away into everlasting punishment.

11:13. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

At first glance, this verse seems to contradict what we have learned about the sequence of end-time events. The first statement – "And the same hour was there a great earthquake" – is evidently talking about Judgment Day. The language is similar to that of Revelation 6, where the opening of the sixth seal was accompanied by earthquakes and the collapse of the universe.

But the remainder of this verse seems to indicate that believers are still here on earth. The "tenth part", for instance, is a term used by the Bible to typify believers. In Nehemiah 10:36,37, the Jews were commanded to bring "the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle...and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks...the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings" to the priests and the house of our God, and "the tithes of our ground... the tithes in all the cities of our tillage" to the Levites.

Those offerings are all symbolic of believers being brought into the kingdom of God. The firstborn, as we learned from our study of Revelation 7:5, are a type of believers. So are the firstfruits, as believers are those that are first harvested. Note that Pentecost is called the Feast of the Firstfruits. It is in this very context that God talks about the tithes, or the tenth parts.

Similarly, in Isaiah 6, God is describing Israel as a people who would hear but understand not, who would see but perceive not. Unbelief has descended upon ancient Israel. When Isaiah asks how long would that go on, God says in verse 11, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate." In other words, it will persist right on all the way through to Judgment Day.

But then in verse 13 God says, "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." This tenth that shall return represents the believers. We are the tenth that comes forth out of the ashes of ancient Israel. That's because we are in Christ and Christ came out of ancient Israel.

Seven thousand. Back in I Kings 19, Elijah was fleeing from the wicked queen Jezebel, who had vowed to kill him. He became very discouraged, thinking that he was the only believer left. God then reassured him, saying in verse 18, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." Thus, seven thousand

in the Bible has to do with believers, the remnant chosen by grace. Incidentally, the word "remnant" itself has to do with those who have become saved.

With all that in mind, you may wonder why is this verse saying that on Judgment Day the tenth part of the city will fall, 7,000 will be slain and the remnant will be affrighted. The answer is, this verse is to be understood in the same fashion as we understood the term "one third" in Revelation 8, 9, 10 and 11. In other words, they represent the corporate church that has turned apostate in the end-time period.

The visible church. At the end of time, which we are now in, virtually all churches and congregations are being dominated by unbelievers, although they identify themselves closely with God. They call themselves Christians and preach gospels that closely resemble the gospel of the Bible. But when Judgment Day comes, these pseudo Christians will be slain, that is, they will still be subject to the second death. That's why they are afraid and finally give glory to God. But it is too late for them to receive salvation.

Remember in Joshua 7, Achan was found guilty of taking gold and silver from Jericho against God's command? Before he and his family was stoned to death and burned with fire, Joshua said to him: "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel" (v. 19). Achan is a picture of the unsaved who, even as they are being cast into hell, are commanded to give glory to God.

11:14. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

In the last verse of Revelation 8, you may recalled, God says, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!" Having judged the apostate church in the first four trumpets, He was then about to widen His judgment upon the whole world. Right after that, He let Satan out of the bottomless pit to deceive the nations and bind the hearts of men.

We noted then that the number three signifies that it is the purpose of God that these woes, horrible though they are, come upon "the inhabitants of the earth". The first and second woes, described in Chapter 9, were associated with the sounding of the fifth and sixth trumpets. Since the third woe, which corresponds to the sounding of the **last trumpet**, will be Judgment Day itself (see Rev. 11:15), the second woe unfolds at the tail end of the final tribulation period.

The idea that God first judges the apostate church and then the world is echoed in other statements in the Bible. For example, in I Peter 4:17, we read, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" The house of God is the churches and congregations where believers are normally found. And this verse says that God begins His judgment there.

Precedent. The reason God judges the church first can be found, among other places, in Jeremiah 25. The people of Judah were then assaulted by the Babylonians and the statement God made on that occasion is highly relevant to us. Remember God says in I Corinthians 10:11 that what happened to ancient Israel were written down as examples and warnings for the church?

In verses 15 and 16, we read: "For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them." The phrase "all the nations" reveals immediately that God is talking about the final Judgment Day.

This is confirmed by the next two verses: "Then took I the cup at the Lord's hand, and made all the

nations to drink, unto whom the Lord had sent me: To wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse."

Notice that it begins with Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. Those are pictures of the corporate church.

Worldwide. From verse 19 through verse 25, Jeremiah names the kings and the peoples of more than a dozen nations. Then he declares in verse 26, "And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them." Sheshach is another name for Babylon; so the king of Sheshach symbolizes Satan. He, too, will come into final judgment.

Now, verse 27: "Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue [that is, vomit], and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you." This is language of eternal damnation.

And verses 28 and 29: "And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink. For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the Lord of hosts."

Effectively God is saying there, "I have destroyed even the church that is called by my name because of its disobedience, how can you, the rest of the unsaved, who have been in total rebellion against me, expect to escape punishment?" By punishing the church first, God has made it clear that there is no way Satan and the unsaved world can avoid Judgment Day.

11:15. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Seventh trumpet. The last of the seven trumpets has finally sounded. As the number seven symbolizes perfection, this is the culmination of God's perfect salvation program. In the remaining chapters of Revelation, God will yet tell us many other things. But as far as the context of Revelation 8 to 11 is concerned, the climax has come.

So, we have here a triumphant statement proclaiming that the Lord Jesus now rules over all the kingdoms of this world and that His reign will never end. Ever since the fall of man, Satan has ruled the world by the right of conquest. True, he cannot do anything beyond what God has allowed him to do. But he has been the prince of the air and has deceived the inhabitants of the earth. Now, the kingdoms of this world have at last become the kingdoms of our Lord.

11:16,17. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

The four and twenty elders, as we learned back in Revelation 4:4, represent all those who have become saved. Notice that they have sat before God, which means that they have ruled with God. Do you remember when does a believer begin to rule with Christ? The moment he becomes saved. We read in Ephesians 2:4-6: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." To have sat together with our Lord in heavenly places is to have ruled with Him.

Now, though, they fall upon their faces as they thank and worship the Lord. They address Him as "Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come". That's how the Lord identified Himself back in verse 8 of Chapter 1. It stresses that Christ is the eternal God, the Lamb that was slain but is alive, and the one who will return to judge the universe and to complete our salvation.

And they are praising Him because He has taken His great power and authority and has begun to reign. Unlike His incarnation, when He came as a meek and lowly suffering servant, He now returns in power and glory.

11:18. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth.

We can understand why believers are grateful when they receive their glorified, spiritual bodies when Christ returns in glory. Their salvation is finally completed. But why should they be thanking God for bringing His wrath upon the unsaved? Why are they so glad that God has come to judge the spiritually dead? Are we not to love our enemies? Yes, we are to be loving now. But once we are raptured, our will is altogether the same as God's will; we rejoice to see God's perfect justice done.

How long will God's wrath come upon the unsaved? There are those who teach that when the unsaved are condemned by God, they simply burn up and cease to exist. Not so. The punishment will be everlasting. The Bible is very clear on that. When we get into Revelation 14, we'll see this in great detail.

Suffice it to note here that in Revelation 22, where God talks about believers forever basking in the presence of God in the new heaven and the new earth, verse 15 states, "For without [meaning outside] are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." In other words, they will exist throughout eternity, but on the outside.

Special rewards? The four and twenty elders are praising God also because He has come to "give reward" unto His servants the prophets and to the saints. Does it mean that when Christ returns, He will evaluate our works and hand out special rewards to those who have served Him extra diligently?

Some passages in the Bible seem to suggest that. Take, for instance, John 4:35,36. Speaking to His disciples, Jesus says: "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together." There, God talks about the reapers receiving wages.

Also, in the parable of the pounds, found in Luke 19, the servant who multiplied his pound most was given authority over the largest number of cities. Likewise, in the parable of the talents of Matthew 25, the one who doubled his five talents into ten was made ruler over the greatest number of things. It thus seems reasonable for us to conclude that if we work extra hard for the Lord on earth, He will give us extra rewards in heaven.

Blessings now. Nevertheless, such a conclusion would not be scriptural because it would not be in harmony with what the rest of the Bible teaches. In Luke 18:28, Peter said, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee," implying that he and the other disciples deserved something extra. And this is what Jesus said in reply, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or

children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

Note that the manifold blessings that come to those who have denied themselves to follow Christ are received "in this present time", this present life. These are the wages spoken of in John 4 that are received by the reapers. You see, as a child of God, we experience a great joy when we use our gifts and resources to serve the Lord. We find it a great blessing when we see unsaved people becoming saved.

Same for all. But in the world to come, "life everlasting" is what Jesus promises. That is the common denominator for everyone who has become a child of God. That's why Revelation 11:18 here speaks of God giving "reward [singular] unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great." The last phrase, "small and great", underscores that such great servants of Christ as David and Apostle Paul will be given the same reward on the last day as the thief on the cross and those believers who have had little opportunity to serve. And that reward is eternal life.

The bema. But what about II Corinthians 5:10, which says: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad"? Indeed, II Corinthians 5:10 is used by many as the proof text to teach that believers will stand before the "bema" seat of Christ, where God will give them rewards on the basis of how well or poorly they have served Him. The fact is, the Greek word *bema* simply means "judgment seat". That Greek word appears nine other times in the Bible and in all those cases, it refers to a court before which the accused are tried.

In Acts 18, for example, God uses that word three times as He gives us the account of Paul being persecuted by the Jews in Corinth. The apostle was brought by the Jews to the bema presided by Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. The word *bema* also appears as "judgment seat" in John 19:13. There, we read, "When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat..." Similarly, we read in Matthew 27:19, "When he [Pilate] was set down on the judgment seat [*bema*], his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man..."

When Jesus stood before the *bema* of Pontius Pilate, He surely was not being evaluated for reward. He was being tried as a prisoner. And there, He was ordered to be crucified by Pilate. Spiritually, you see, that is a picture of Jesus standing before the *bema* of God on our behalf, and He was found guilty because He had taken upon Himself all of our sins.

Died with Christ. What II Corinthians 5:10 really teaches, therefore, is that every human will be judged by God and will receive "according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad", that is, according to what he deserves. It sets forth the same principle as that of Hebrews 9:27: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." And what every human deserves, of course, is eternal punishment because "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12).

The next verse, verse 11, of II Corinthians 5, gives us further insight into this point. It reads, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." In other words, knowing that Judgment Day is coming, Paul persuades men to become saved, as salvation through the blood of Christ is the only way by which one can escape the terror of the Lord. This escape is available because, in Christ, every believer effectively stood before this *bema* of God already. In Christ, every believer was already found guilty by God and every believer already suffered God's wrath on the cross.

Thus, Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ..."; and in Romans 6:4, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father."

Unprofitable servants. Instead of seeking rewards, Luke 17:10 teaches what the attitude of every believer should be: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."

How then are we to understand the parables of the pounds and the talents? They certainly show that some people will have more authority, or will rule over more things, than others in heaven.

Well, let's look at it this way. In this world, some people have great abilities and opportunities and, as a result, they hold high positions with great authority in government or in business. Have these people been given bigger rewards than others because they had done greater works in a past life? Of course not. In His sovereignty, God has simply given different lots and assigned different tasks to different people on earth.

And so it will be in eternity. God will assign different responsibilities to different people. One will rule over five cities, another will rule over two. What that means, we don't know. But we do know that it is not a form of reward for our good works. God never owes anyone anything.

Satan destroyed. Earlier, the four and twenty elders rejoiced because the time had come to judge the unsaved. Now, they end their praise saying: "and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth."

Satan and his fallen angels, of course, are them which destroy the earth. The devil is the very essence of destruction. Back in Revelation 9:11, we saw that his name is *Abaddon* in the Hebrew and *Apollyon* in the Greek, both of which mean destruction.

Once the **last trumpet** is sounded, he will no longer be able to destroy. Instead, he will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ. He will be tormented in hell forever.

11:19. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

This is a victorious statement. In the three and a half chapters prior to the sounding of the seventh trumpet, God has focused our eyes on the final tribulation period, when the temple was "trodden under foot", to use the language of Daniel 8:13. That's the period when most congregations were overtaken by false prophets. Satan seemed to have won.

But once that seventh trumpet is blown, the table is turned. Now, the real temple of God is seen in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ coming on the clouds of glory shining like lightning from east to west. The temple of God is opened in heaven and everyone sees the culmination of His glorious salvation plan, which is represented here by the ark.

The ark in the Old Testament was a chest placed in the Holy of Holies. In it were a gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the ten commandments. The lid of that ark was called the mercy seat, on which the priest would sprinkle blood once a year on the Day of Atonement. And above the ark were the two cherubim with their outstretched wings.

Both the ark and the cherubim represented God Himself.

The mercy seat symbolized the propitiation provided by the shed blood of Christ. The two tablets within the ark stood for the Word of God, and Christ is the Word of God. The manna represents the heavenly bread that Christ is and

the budding staff is a picture of the new life that Christ brings to His people. The whole scene, therefore, is a picture of God having successfully fulfilled His promise to build His church and to save His people.

Heavenly grace. The lightnings, thunderings, earthquake, and great hail in the final statement are all signs of Christ coming to judge this world. The voices tie back to verse 15, where the great voices in heaven proclaim that the Lord shall reign for ever and ever. They reflect the awesome majesty of God.

Elsewhere in the Bible, God speaks of all kinds of heavenly signs in connection with the Last Day. Matthew 24:29 says, for instance, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." It is actually a quotation from Isaiah 13:10 in the Old Testament, which was also talking about Judgment Day.

But in this verse, God mentions five items. As we have learned before, the number five is the number of grace. It stresses that the entire salvation plan has come from God's amazing grace. And that grace is now being witnessed in all of its glory.

Revelation 12

*Lesson 19 for Revelation 12:1-17 ~ "Satan: The Persistent Enemy"*¹⁹

12:1. And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.

The Apostle John now sees a brand new vision. Unrelated chronologically to the seven seals and the seven trumpets, this one gives us a behind-the-scenes look at the persistent attack that Satan has been making against Christ and His church. While verse 5 reveals that this "woman" brought forth the Lord Jesus, she cannot be a picture of Mary, the mother of Christ, because verses 6 and 14 tell us that after the childbirth, she fled to the wilderness where she was fed for 1,260 days. Mary didn't do that. She and baby Jesus were taken by Joseph down to Egypt instead.

Moreover, the period of 1,260 days, as we discussed at length when we studied Revelation 11:2, really represents the entire New Testament period. So, this woman cannot possibly be a symbol of any human being.

The eternal church. The Bible, however, often uses a woman to picture the church. We read in Ephesians 5:31,32, for example: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church." And Revelation 21:9 calls the church the bride of the Lamb.

So, this woman really represents the church from whom Jesus was brought forth. In this respect, this vision ties back to Genesis 3:15, where God declared, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The seed of the woman is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Might the woman represent the nation of Israel then? No. True, before the cross, Israel was the corporate representation of the kingdom of God on earth. But most people in the nation of Israel were unbelievers, and there is no enmity existing between Satan and unbelievers.

It is the eternal church, then, that brought forth the Lord Jesus. Up to the point of His birth, that

church had comprised all the Old Testament believers, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Mary, the human mother of Jesus. After Pentecost, believers from all nations have been added to it.

Sun and moon. Thus, we see this woman clothed with the sun. The sun, as we have seen many times before, is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. And true believers are commanded to "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14). She also has the moon under her feet. As we learned earlier, the moon is a type of Satan. Having been defeated by Christ at the cross, Satan is now under the feet of the church, as well as those of the Lord Himself. Hence, Romans 8:37 declares that we believers "are more than conquerors".

An Old Testament passage that presents much the same truth as Revelation 12:1 is Malachi 4:2,3. It reads, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts." Note that Christ is called "the Sun of righteousness" and that the "wicked" are ashes under the soles of believers.

Crown of stars. Remember back in Revelation 1:20, the Lord told the Apostle John that the stars in His right hand were the messengers of the churches? Believers are pictured as stars in Daniel 12 also. Speaking of the end of time, verses 2 and 3 declare: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

The crown upon the woman's head signifies kingship and it has twelve stars. The number twelve in the Bible signifies fullness, especially that of the body of believers. Indeed, believers are kings; they have royal blood. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood," God says in I Peter 2:9.

In sum, all these symbols underscore that this woman is a picture of the eternal church of Christ.

12:2. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

Before the Messiah came, had true believers suffered from great pain? Yes, indeed. For hundreds of years, they were in deep despair. As we've just seen, God first promised to send a Messiah right after Adam and Eve fell, saying that the woman's seed would bruise Satan's head. Subsequently, God reiterated the promise over and over again. So, while unbelievers within the nation of Israel didn't understand what God had promised, believers were eagerly waiting for the redeemer to come.

But then, Israel turned progressively apostate. In response, God actually stopped all prophetic utterance to them around 400 BC. As a result, just before Christ was born, four hundred years of silence had caused great anguish to build up in the souls of the few believers that existed. For that reason, many women of that day were named "Mary", which means bitter.

12:3. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

As we'll soon see, this dragon is identified in verse 9 as Satan himself. Moreover, the color red is often linked by the Bible to wickedness. We read in Isaiah 1:18, for instance, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Satan, of course, is by far the greatest and most wicked sinner.

Here, we see that this great red dragon has seven heads and ten horns, and that there are seven crowns upon his heads. In Revelation 13, we'll see a beast coming out of the sea that also has seven heads and ten horns, but the crowns are on the horns. And when we get to Revelation 17, we'll find once more a beast with seven heads and ten horns, but there's no mention of either being crowned.

Why the difference? Remember, the number seven indicates the perfection of what God has in view; and ten, the completeness thereof. Revelation 17 further gives us these definitions: "The seven heads are seven mountains" (v. 9), and "the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings" (v. 12). A king, of course, is one who has the power to rule, especially when he is crowned.

With that in mind, we can say that in all cases, the beast is a picture of the dominion of Satan. Here in Revelation 12, where the seven heads are crowned, the perfectness of Satan's rule over his kingdom throughout time is highlighted. In Revelation 13, where the ten horns are crowned, the emphasis is on the final tribulation period, when Satan is especially powerful. We'll be able to see this difference more clearly when we get to Revelation 17.

12:4a. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.

At first glance, this verse seems to say that Satan caused a third of the angels to rebel with him, since we know that devils are fallen angels. But looking at it carefully, we see that it was a third part of the stars of heaven that was cast down by Satan's tail. As we just noted in verse 1, stars have to do with believers.

When we began to study the blowing of the seven trumpets, remember, we determined that the term "the third part" refers to either the eternal or the corporate church, depending on the context. And in our study of Revelation 9:10, we learned that tails have to do with false prophets.

So, God is telling us here that before the birth of Jesus, national Israel, the corporate church of that day, had been cast down by Satan's false prophets onto the path to destruction.

12:4b. And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

Meanwhile, from the line of true believers that extended down to Mary, Jesus was about to come forth. Satan, of course, was not literally standing there in Bethlehem prepared to pounce upon the baby Jesus in the manger. He worked through King Herod in his attempt to devour the child.

After Jesus was born, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Matt. 2:2). From Micah 5:2, the priests and scribes determined that the Messiah must have been born in Bethlehem of Judea. King Herod then told the Magi, "When ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also" (Matt. 2:8).

Instead of worshipping Christ, though, Herod really wanted to have that child killed. So, when the Magi did not return, he issued an order to have all the babies in Bethlehem up to two years old killed. But Satan failed to devour Jesus because Joseph, forewarned by an angel of the Lord, had "When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt" (v. 14).

12:5. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

That man child was the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to save His people. But this verse directs our attention to another function of His, namely, to rule all nations with a rod of iron. Many

¹⁹ *New Life Digest*, Third Quarter 1999.

theologians take this to mean that someday, from His throne in physical Jerusalem, Christ will have such an iron-fisted rule over all the nations that sin will no longer be able to rear its ugly head on this earth. But the phrase "ruling with a rod of iron", which God originally used in Psalm 2, doesn't mean that at all. In that Messianic Psalm, we read in verses 7-9: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Note that the rod of iron is that which Christ will use to break the heathen, or the nations, into pieces like a broken potter's vessel. It is a picture of Judgment Day. So, this is what the first half of Revelation 12:5 teaches: The very Christ that has now come as a man child will on the Last Day judge and condemn all the unsaved in the world.

His throne. Despite the dragon's repeated attempts to devour Him, Jesus lived out His sinless life on earth and was then caught up unto God, and to His throne as well. Why the emphasis on the throne?

The answer can be found in Ephesians 1. After God had raised Christ from the dead, He "set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (vv. 20-22).

You see, Christ was born to be a king. When Pontius Pilate asked Him, "Art thou a king then?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world" (John 18:37). Hence, after he had been crucified and resurrected, Jesus was caught up to His throne at the right hand of God.

12:6. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

Satan, after having failed to devour Jesus Himself, has since been going after His body, the body of believers. So, the woman fled into the wilderness. In the Old Testament, the wilderness was where the Israelites spent forty years after they had been led out of Egypt. During that period, they were tested severely. Only when they had finally crossed the Jordan River did they come into the promised land of Canaan. Only then was their deliverance completed. Egypt is a figure of our enslavement to sin and Satan; and Canaan, the new heaven and the new earth.

Once we become saved, we are taken out of our bondage to sin and Satan. But we continue to live on this earth as strangers and pilgrims. Spiritually speaking, we are now sojourning in the wilderness, where we are attacked by Satan, by evil men and even by our own sinful nature. Only on the last day, when we finally receive our resurrected bodies, will our salvation be consummated.

Prepared place. Meanwhile, God has a place prepared for us in this wilderness. It means that God has a job for us to do here. Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21) and "ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Christ has assigned us a very deliberate task, the task of serving as His ambassadors. That command is given to every one of us. Our place in the world is to send forth the gospel to all nations.

In another sense, the place God has prepared for believers on this earth is the congregation to which we belong. We are living in a day when

more and more churches are turning apostate. But if at all possible, we are to find one that is still reasonably true to the Word of God and belong to it. The Bible says in Hebrews 10:24,25: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

In a church, we worship as a congregation. We also gather together to strengthen and exhort one another. Living as we do in a hostile world, we need the support and encouragement of fellow believers. And as the last half of this verse stresses, we also need to be fed.

Spiritual feeding. The 1,260 days in the last part of this verse is a figure for the entire New Testament period, as we have already determined. But who are the "they" who should feed the woman, the body of believers, during this period?

Strictly speaking, of course, God Himself feeds us with His Word. But He does that primarily through the teaching we receive from the physical church we attend. Ephesians 4:11 says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." As those who are gifted to teach administer God's Word to us, the Holy Spirit will lead us into truth.

As we approach the end of time, with virtually all churches having ceased to present the whole counsel of God, it may be necessary for individual believers to rely more on home-based Bible studies that are led by God-fearing teachers, or on studies provided by those parachurch ministries that remain faithful to the Word. I pray that Family Radio will be numbered among the latter throughout this final tribulation period.

12:7,8. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

In all likelihood, you have been taught that Michael is an angel. I used to think so, too. But having carefully studied all the verses pertaining to Michael, I am convinced that He is Christ Himself. Let me hasten to state that I am **not** saying that the Lord Jesus Christ is an angel. Such an idea is repugnant to the Scriptures. He is the Eternal God from everlasting past to everlasting future; He is the Creator of all things, including the angels.

Michael is commonly believed to be an angel because in one isolated verse in the Bible, verse 9 of Jude, He was identified as "Michael the archangel". The word "arch" means "chief" or "captain" or someone who rules.

Chief messenger. But as I've pointed out many times before, the Greek word for "angel" also means "messenger". So, it would have been perfectly scriptural had the translators used the phrase "Michael the arch messenger" in Jude 9. And I think that's what they should have done.

You see, Christ is the chief messenger of God. We know that to be so because God says in Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." Without any doubt whatsoever, Christ is the promised messenger of the covenant.

Besides Revelation 12:7 and Jude 9, this Michael appears in the Bible only three other times, and all in the Book of Daniel. In Chapter 10, we find a man saying to Daniel in a vision, "the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one [or the first] of the chief princes, came to help me" (v. 13), and "there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince" (v. 21). Then, in Chapter 12, where God talks about the end of

time, we read in verse 1, "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people."

Prince. Notice that in all three times, Michael is called prince. A prince is someone who rules. Angels are not rulers in any way. Of them, Hebrews 1:14 asks rhetorically, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" In other words, all angels were created and sent forth to serve the elect of God.

True, Satan, an angel being, is called "the prince of the power of the air" in Ephesians 2:2. But that's only because he rebelled against God and led other angels to rebel with him.

So Michael, described as "the first of the chief princes", "your prince" and "the great prince", cannot possibly be a ministering spirit. In fact, only Christ qualifies as "the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people" at the end of time.

Satan defeated. So, it was Christ Himself who led the fight against Satan in the war in heaven. And the dragon prevailed not. When we get down to verse 11, we'll see that Christ defeated Satan at the cross.

Satan's defeat cost him his place in heaven. Anticipating that event, Jesus had said in Luke 10:18, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Prior to the cross, you see, Satan still enjoyed many privileges up there.

We read in Job 1:6, "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them." Satan even held a conversation with God, during which he was given permission to put Job through great trials as a means to test Job's loyalty to God.

Why was Satan allowed to remain in heaven prior to the cross? Because up to that point, eternal damnation for those rebelling against God was just a threat. Nobody had been so punished. But when Christ paid for the sins of believers by receiving the full wrath of God, which was equivalent to all of them spending an eternity in hell, the precedent was set. It guaranteed that God's justice will be carried out and that all sinners will be eternally condemned.

12:9. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Here, God makes it clear that the serpent, the Devil, Satan and the dragon all refer to the same individual, the one who deceives the whole world. This does not mean that Satan is personally deceiving every human being. Being a created being, he is not omnipresent. In Job, when God asked Satan where he had come from, he answered, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (1:7). He goes to and fro in the earth; he cannot be in two places at a time.

How, then, does he deceive the whole world? For one thing, he did deceive Eve, and Eve was "the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). For another, he has working for him a large number of fallen angels and human beings that are false prophets. They, too, have been deceiving the unsaved.

12:10. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

With Christ having gone to the cross, salvation is no longer just a promise; it has become a reality. Along with salvation, it says here, comes strength. The Greek word for "strength" here is *dunamis*, the same word that is translated "power" in Acts 1:8, where Jesus says, "ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come

upon you"; and in Romans 1:16, where Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Thus, this strength refers to the evangelistic power of the Holy Spirit.

Now comes also "the kingdom of our God". This is the kingdom that Christ came to establish. Right after He had been baptized and tested, you may recall, Jesus began to preach, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). This is a spiritual, not political, kingdom. Christ made that clear to Pilate, saying, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Finally, it says here, now is come "the power of his Christ". The Greek for "power" in this phrase is different from that for the "strength" that we saw earlier. It means "authority". In Matthew 28:18, the resurrected Christ came to His disciples and said, "All power [or authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In other words, Christ has been given the full authority to liberate God's elect from Satan's control.

Accuser. Remember how Satan accused Job of being a hypocrite? He said to the Lord, "Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land" (1:9,10).

And in Jude 9, there is a reference to Satan disputing with God "about the body of Moses". The Bible does not give us any other information about that dispute, but from the two passages that relate to the body of Moses, we can get a good idea of what it might have been.

After Moses had died, we read in Deuteronomy 34:6, "And he [the LORD] buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." Why had God hidden the location of Moses' grave from men? Because He subsequently resurrected Moses' body. This explains why Moses was able to appear as he did, along with Elijah, on the Mount of Transfiguration and converse with Christ.

But the resurrection of believers' bodies, according to I Corinthians 15, is predicated on Christ's own resurrection, even as the salvation of God's elect is predicated on Christ's finished work on the cross. While in principle Jesus was slain and raised from before the foundation of the earth, Satan evidently challenged that God had no right to raise Moses' body.

For that matter, before the cross, Satan undoubtedly disputed with God about the salvation of Old Testament believers as well. He probably accused Jacob before God, for example, for having stolen his brother's birthright, and David for having committed adultery and murder.

Satan accused our brothers day and night no doubt to justify his own rebellion. But after Christ had died for all the sins of believers, Satan no longer had any grounds for making such accusations. Hence, he was cast down from heaven.

12:11. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

The blood of the Lamb refers to Christ's death on the cross. The word of their testimony is the Word of God as it is proclaimed by believers. Every time we share the gospel with an unsaved person, we assault the prison house of Satan. And if that person is one of God's elect, he will sooner or later become saved. That's because the word of our testimony, which is the sword of the Spirit, will surely overcome Satan.

Over the ages, an untold number of devout Christians have been martyred for Christ's sake: "...they loved not their lives unto the death." But that statement is also spiritually true with every born-gain believer. When we become saved, we no longer love our old lives; we put them to death in order to live a new life in Christ. We thus read in Romans 8:13,14: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." To mortify means to put to death.

12:12. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Luke 15:10 reveals that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." And, of course, those believers whose souls are with the Lord in heaven also rejoice over the fact that God's salvation program is now in full swing.

But although we are still here on this earth, we rejoice as well. We read in Philippians 3:20, "For our conversation [meaning citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." So, from the moment we are saved, we rejoice because we are dwelling spiritually in heaven.

Woe to the earth. As we learned when we studied Revelation 7:1, the sea is a picture of the peoples of the earth, particularly the unsaved multitudes of the world. Woe to them now because Satan is coming down with great anger. He realizes that he has little time left before he is sent to everlasting punishment.

Remember the time Jesus healed the two demon-possessed men? The demons He had cast out said in Matthew 8:29, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" You see, they knew that when Judgment Day comes, they will be sent to hell to be tormented.

In James 2:19, we read, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." Why do they tremble? Because they know that Judgment Day is coming.

Fear leads to frustrating anger, however. And in his desperation, Satan has since come with great wrath. He apparently thinks that if he could prevent people from becoming saved, he would be able to postpone the inevitable. The fact is, Christ shall build His church and He shall complete it right on His schedule.

12:13. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

Inasmuch as Satan can no longer hurt Christ Himself, he has been venting his anger by persecuting the body of Christ, the church. He has been persecuting the church through bloodlettings. Christians have been thrown to the lions, tortured in prison and burned at the stakes. Even today, many Christians have been put in jail because of their faith.

But Satan's most devilish method of assaulting the church is spiritual in nature. His false prophets have been infiltrating congregations all over the world. Coming with signs and wonders or with sugar-coated gospels, they have been deceiving people into believing that they are saved, while all the time those victims remain under the wrath of God.

12:14. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

Speaking of His special relationship to Israel, God says back in Deuteronomy 32:11,12, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth

them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him." It is a picture of God providing His children with protective care.

God also says in Isaiah 40:31, "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Thus, in the first half of this verse, God assures us that when He calls us to serve Him in this world, He also gives us the strength to do the task, as well as His protective care. The rest of verse 14 is a reiteration of what was stated in verse 6. (Three-and-a-half times means three-and-a-half years, which corresponds to the 1,260 days in verse 6.) By saying twice that the woman is to be fed and nourished, God underscores how important it is for us to study the Word. There simply is no other way whereby we can develop our spiritual strength.

12:15. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

The Greek word for "flood" here is normally translated "river" elsewhere in the Bible. It's the very same word that God uses in John 7:38, where Jesus says, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The rivers of living water represent the true gospel as it is applied to God's elect by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, by the serpent casting out of his mouth water as a flood, God is saying that Satan's emissaries will be mouthing gospels that sound almost like the true one, but are in fact of the devil. Because these gospels appeal to the worldly mass, many congregations in the corporate church will be carried away by this river of poison water. This is especially pronounced in the current final tribulation period.

12:16. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

An account recorded in Numbers 16, I believe, can help us understand what God has in view here. There, we find three men, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, rebelling against Moses. They challenged his authority and wanted to be priests themselves. The next morning, the Lord told the Israelites to separate themselves from the tents of those three men. Moses then told the congregation that if these three men experienced only what usually happens to men, then they were right in questioning Moses' authority. And he continued in verse 30, "But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD."

The outcome: "And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation" (vv. 31-33).

That is a vivid picture of how God, until recently, had supernaturally kept Satan's emissaries from taking over the church. Over the past two thousand years, many a heretical movement has emerged and gained considerable following. But somehow, God has opened the earth's mouth, so to speak, and swallow up the threat.

As we approach the end of time, though, those bringing the river of poisoned water are becoming more and more successful. But that's only because God's plan calls for Satan to prevail for a season. Even so, as Matthew 24:24 suggests, God will keep His elect from being deceived.

12:17. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Like the woman herself, "the remnant of her seed" represents the body of believers. The Bible indicates in many places that believers are but a remnant of the whole. We read in Isaiah 10:21, for instance, "The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God."

Does "the remnant of Jacob" mean that those returning to God will come only from national Israel? No. In the same context, Isaiah 11:10 says, "And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious." The root of Jesse, as we learned when we studied Revelation 5:5, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He will be sought by the Gentiles, that is, non-Jews who come to believe on Him. And they will find resting in His atoning work on the cross to be glorious.

To show further that the remnant refers to all believers, verses 11 and 12 read, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."

Second gathering. Notice it says there that the Lord shall recover the remnant the second time, implying that God recovered the remnant once before. Well, that was after the Israelites had been thrown into captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. When the Medes and Persians defeated the Babylonians and came into power, God raised up Nehemiah and Ezra to gather a remnant of Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the wall.

That, however, was pointing to the second gathering. This time, the remnant will be the Israel of God, those whom God had chosen to save. Dispersed in the four corners of the world, they are called a remnant because they account for only a tiny percentage of the whole human race.

Here in Revelation 12:17, God uses the term "remnant of her seed" to represent the body of believers. This expression emphasizes that Satan will attack one generation of believers after another. His war against the body of Christ will persist throughout the New Testament period.

Obedience. This remnant is described as they "which keep the commandments of God". That's because only true believers find in their heart an earnest desire to do the will of God. Out of the heartfelt joy and gratitude, believers instinctively want their life to be pleasing to their Savior. This is part of their new nature.

The commandments of God include the whole Word of God, everything that the Bible teaches. In the New Testament, though, Jesus sums it up in two great commandments. In Mark 12:29-31, He says: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

Effectively, those two commandments encompass the whole law of God. We are to love God with our entire being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. How do we love God with our entire being? Only by becoming a child of God, because only then is there real righteousness in our life. It doesn't mean that we literally love God totally once we're saved. We

still have a desire for the things of this world. But God looks upon us as though we do love Him above all, because we are covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness.

Testimony. And we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we truly love our neighbors, we naturally want them to have the very best. And we can help them get the very best by showing them the way to become saved. And this ties in with the final phrase of Revelation 12:17 - the remnant "have the testimony of Jesus Christ".

You see, believers are mandated by God to send the gospel into the world. And indeed, all true believers desire to see salvation come to others, especially their loved ones. This, incidentally, is why Satan is angry at the remnant. Not every believer is qualified to evangelize, however. And not every Christian is capable to witness to his neighbors eloquently. But in His wisdom, God often uses the most childlike expressions and the simplest statements to bring about His plan of salvation in the lives of others.

Moreover, there is always something every believer can do to carry the testimony of Jesus. We can engage in evangelistic work through missions programs in the church, for example. And we can provide financial support to ministries that faithfully send forth the gospel.

Revelation 13

Lesson 20 for Revelation 13:1-10 ~ "The First Beast,"²⁰

13:1. And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

The Apostle John now sees a beast in a new vision which, like the great red dragon in Revelation 12, also has seven heads and ten horns. But whereas the crowns were on the heads of the dragon in Revelation 12, they are upon the horns of this beast. The variation reflects **the different time periods** that these creatures represent.

In Revelation 12, **the seven heads were crowned** because the dragon was a picture of the comprehensiveness of Satan's dominion; in other words, the entire rule of Satan throughout time. We thus read about the dragon's activities both before and after the delivery of the man child by the woman.

Here in Revelation 13, **the crowning of the ten horns** highlights the fullness of Satan's power, because the vision pertains mainly to the final tribulation period.

Out of the sea. In the Bible, God sometimes uses the sea to represent the unsaved people of the world. We read, for example, in Isaiah 57:20: "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

Some other times, the sea is a picture of hell. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus says, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." There, He effectively declares that Jonah being in the belly of the great fish was a picture of His being punished in hell for our sins. Note that inside the fish, Jonah says in his prayer, "For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me" (2:3).

Here in Revelation 13:1, both symbols apply. That the beast rises up out of the sea means that the dominion of Satan comprises all the unsaved people of the world. And every human being, unless and until he becomes a child of God by faith, is consigned to spend eternity in hell.

Condemned. People like to point to God's love by quoting John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But notice what verse 18 says: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

The symbol of having a name upon the head can be traced back to Exodus 28. There, Moses was told in verse 36 to engrave on a gold plate the words "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" and fasten that plate to the front of a mitre, or a diadem. Then, God said in verse 38, "And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD."

Aaron, wearing that mitre on his forehead as he went about his priestly duties, was a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ being set apart by God to be our sin-bearer.

The Antichrist. Upon the heads of this beast, however, is the name of blasphemy. To blaspheme is to revile and abuse that which is God's. You see, Satan is the Antichrist; and all his emissaries, the false prophets and teachers, are the antichrists. Like many others, I used to think that the antichrist was an unusually evil human individual that would emerge toward the end of time. But after having meditated on I John 4:3, I have since concluded that it cannot be. That verse reads, "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

If the antichrist was already in the world when the Apostle John wrote that epistle, which was more than 1,900 years ago, and if he was also expected to come toward the end of time, he obviously cannot be a human being. He has to be a spirit; he has to be Satan.

So, with the picture of the beast having the name blasphemy upon his heads, God is warning us that Satan's workers will mimic God's ambassadors in many details. A more direct warning of this appears in II Corinthians 11:14,15: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."

13:2. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

Significantly, what John sees in this vision closely resembles the four beasts of Daniel 7. For instance...

Dan. 7:2,3: Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another.

Note that the beasts in Daniel's vision also came up from the sea. This is not a coincidence by any means, as we will see later on. To better understand this Revelation verse, therefore, let's study it along with what God has to say in Daniel 7.

Lion. We see here that it has a mouth as the mouth of a lion. This means that although

²⁰ *New Life Digest*, Fourth Quarter 1999. [Original Series - Revelation 13:1-11a "The Two Beasts", *NLD*, Apr-Jun 1991.]

Satan's workers speak much as the true ministers of the gospel do, they are really out to devour. Why? Jesus is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah in Revelation 5:5, and the devil is described in I Peter 5:8 as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. This is reinforced by...

Dan. 7:4: The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it.

Even as the woman in Revelation 12 (a picture of the body of believers) was given the wings of a great eagle, the first beast that Daniel saw had eagle's wings. Again, Satan tries to imitate the church. But its wings have been plucked off; it cannot provide the protective care and the spiritual strength that God gives His people. In short, this beast does not save people. And being a spirit, Satan has to work through men. So, this beast was made to stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it.

Bear. The feet of the beast that John sees in Revelation 13:2 are as the feet of a bear. The bear is another picture of Satan. Proverbs 28:15 says, "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." Surely, Satan is the wicked ruler over his slaves. Moreover...

Dan. 7:5: "And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh."

In the Garden of Eden, God took a rib out of the side of Adam and formed Eve. Later, Adam called his wife's name Eve "because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). Thus, these ribs represent the entire human race. They are now in the mouth of Satan; all the unsaved are his prey.

But God has not lost control. As the number three represents the purpose of God (we discussed that when we studied Revelation 9:17), the picture of three ribs assures us that Satan's attempt to devour the whole human race is a part of God's salvation plan.

Leopard. Revelation 13:2 also says that the beast was like unto a leopard. And...

Dan. 7:6: "After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it."

In Habakkuk 1, there is a verse that talks about leopards flying. Warning that He would raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to destroy Judah, God says in verse 8, "Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat."

Thus, in both Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, God was indicating that, just as He raised up Babylon to conquer the apostate Judah, He would use Satan to bring judgment against the end-time church. Note that in this Daniel verse, the number four, which symbolizes universality, is conspicuously featured. It speaks of the "four wings of a fowl" and the "four heads" of the beast. It underscores the universality of Satan's rule during the final tribulation period.

13:3. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

In Psalm 68:21, we read that "God shall wound the head of his enemies." Christ indeed fatally wounded Satan, His prime enemy, at the cross. Hebrews 2:14 says: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

But why was the deadly wound healed? Because the death blow Christ dealt Satan is that which guarantees eternal condemnation for Satan on Judgment Day. But Judgment Day will not come until God's program to evangelize the world has fully unfolded. Most of the people God had chosen to save must still be born during the New Testament period. As long as this world exists, Satan still has the right to rule over the unsaved.

Significantly, this statement of Satan having been healed appears in the context of "all the world wondered after the beast". You see, only in the blinded eyes of the world does Satan appear healthy and well. The unsaved do not understand what happened at the cross. They are just fascinated by what Satan has to offer here and now.

13:4. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

Not only do the people of the world wonder after Satan, they even worship him. To be sure, not many people openly admit that they are Satan worshippers; the great majority of the unsaved don't. But Jesus says, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Matt. 6:24). Thus, anyone who does not worship God is in fact worshipping the devil.

This verse says that the dragon, which represents Satan, is the one who gives power to the beast, which represents his kingdom or the unsaved world. But it also notes that they worshipped both the dragon and the beast. The point is, one cannot really separate Satan from the world that he rules; the two are intimately related to each other. Hence, God says in I John 2:15, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

At any rate, the unsaved are so enamored by what Satan has to offer that they say, "Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?" In their way of thinking, nothing can beat the things that the world offers. What they don't know is that neither the power nor the wisdom of the world is meaningful when it comes to salvation. God says in I Corinthians 1: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent...Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (vv. 18, 19, 25).

13:5. And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

Whenever a person comes with a theory or a philosophy that denies the existence of God or challenges the Word of God, he is speaking blasphemies. And since time began, Satan has been doing just that. When Eve told the serpent that God had forbidden them to eat or touch the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, Satan replied, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

One of the "great things" that the Satan-ruled world has been speaking in recent generations is the theory of evolution. It claims that there is no Creator. Based entirely on unprovable theories and assumptions, evolutionism is nevertheless being presented by the academic and scientific establishments as the absolute truth. The Bible flatly declares that God created this universe; He spoke and it came into being. In fact, God demonstrated His creative power dramatically when Jesus turned water into wine. But the world insists on teaching evolutionism – so much so that even theologians have found it increasingly necessary to work around the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

Until recently, Satan had also used atheistic Communism extensively to fool people into believing that there is no God. And among the tools he is still using are Humanism, which also claims that there is no God, and the New Age Movement, which in essence declares that every person is a god.

How long will this deception go on? To the end of time. God has given Satan power to continue forty and two months. That period, we saw earlier, is symbolic of the final tribulation, the period that leads to Judgment Day itself.

13:6. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

The primary target of Satan's blasphemies is God and all that He stands for. But the devil, it says here, also blasphemes His tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven. Since Christ's death on the cross, when the veil of the temple was rent in two, believers of the Lord Jesus Christ have been God's tabernacle.

We read in I Peter 2:5, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;" and in I Corinthians 3:16, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

In this context, we are also "them that dwell in heaven". That's because our citizenship is in heaven; we are but strangers and pilgrims on earth.

Blessed persecution. The more faithfully we preach and teach the Word of God, the more we are targeted for Satan's blasphemies. We are ridiculed, we are reviled, we are put down. Some of the strongest attacks, in fact, come from within Christendom. To undercut our efforts to send forth the true gospel, Satan uses all kinds of people to discredit us.

When our Lord was on earth, He, too, was despised and reviled. What happened to the Master, the Bible declares, will happen to the servants. When Jesus was reviled, He reviled not in return. That's the example He wants us to follow. And we can follow that example cheerfully when we remember that it is a blessing to be persecuted for Christ's sake. "Blessed are ye," Jesus says, "when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11,12).

13:7. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

Who are the saints? Some Christians in the past who lived such a virtuous life as to deserve special honor in the church? No, every child of God is a saint. In fact, the Greek word for "saint" is the same word for "holy". It means someone who has been set apart for the service of God. All believers are so separated. The Apostle Paul writes, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

In this context, though, the saints that are overcome by Satan refer to the churches and congregations where believers normally assemble. So, this verse is saying once again that during the final tribulation period in which we are living, virtually all congregations are overtaken by false prophets.

We have learned many times in this study that God emphasizes that this apostasy is worldwide in nature. To convey the idea of universality, God normally features the number four. He would use an expression like "all kindreds and tongues and nations and peoples".

But this verse says that Satan was given power over "all kindreds, and tongues, and nations". With

the number three, God is reassuring us that He has purposely let Satan overcome most congregations at this end time. He is using Satan to set both the corporate church and the world up for Judgment.

13:8. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

As I said earlier, the people of the world are not expected to openly engage in Satanic worship. The devil is not so crass. Rather, Satan will have people worshipping him, while thinking all the time that they are worshipping Christ or the gods of their religions. That's why God warns in I Thessalonians 2:3,4: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

This man of sin is Satan, of course. He is the exact opposite of God. But he will nevertheless sit in the temple as if he were God! And he works through his counterfeit ministers. As people follow those false preachers, they will effectively be worshipping Satan.

Two books. This verse shows that the names of the unsaved are not written in the book of life of the Lamb. Back in Revelation 3:5, God says of the true believer, "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." Are these the same book? I talked about this when we studied Revelation 1, but let me review it briefly here.

In the Bible, God speaks of "the book of life" from two vantage points. From the **creation** vantage point, there is the book of life which originally contained the names of every human being. That's because all humans were effectively in the loins of Adam and Eve, and when God created Adam and Eve, He created them without sin. So, their names were written in that book. But when a person dies in sin, his name is blotted out of that book because only those who are blameless in God's sight – that is, those whose sins have been covered by the blood of Christ – can have their names remain in it.

The Bible also speaks of a Lamb's book of life from the **redemption** vantage point. In it, according to Revelation 17:8, God had written the names of all those whom He had elected to save before time began. This truth is reflected in Ephesians 1:4: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

Come Judgment Day, though, the two books will contain exactly the same names, the names of all the believers.

Slain in principle. It says here that the book of life is of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world". That latter statement is highly important. Living as we do on the New Testament side of the cross, we know for a fact that Christ died for our sins on the cross and therefore we who believe can have forgiveness. But how could God save any Old Testament believer without compromising His justice? Answer: in principle, Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the earth.

You see, God is perfect; He cannot lie. Once He had decreed that under his salvation program He would send His Son to die on the cross for the elect, nothing could change it. Therefore, even though Christ had yet to go to the cross in the Old Testament era, the fact that God had decreed it from the foundation of the world was sufficient for believers then to become saved.

13:9. If any man have an ear, let him hear.

This is essentially the same statement we saw repeatedly back in Revelation 2 and 3. There, Jesus closed every one of His letters to the

seven churches with this remark: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." It stresses that the warnings He gave to the individual churches were meant for all churches throughout time. But it also reveals that not all churchgoers have a spiritual ear to hear what God has to say.

This important truth is amplified in I Corinthians 2:14: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

During much of the New Testament period, believers indeed had the spiritual ear to hear the Word of God and obediently refrained from engaging in heretical practices. Hence, at least a segment of the institutional church remained reasonably pure. Whenever a congregation or a denomination turned apostate, faithful Christians would form a new one to carry on the work of the church.

Timely reminder. But the context of Revelation 13 is the present final tribulation period, when virtually all churches are in varying degrees falling away. This is a time when true believers are especially hard pressed not to waver. So, God is reminding those to whom He has given a spiritual ear to listen carefully to what He is saying. To wit, beware of false prophets; beware of preachers who do not bring the whole counsel of God.

Indeed, with the end of time drawing closer and closer, more and more congregations, including fundamental and evangelical churches, have ceased to bring the whole counsel of God. Instead of warning the unsaved of eternal damnation in hell, most pastors talk only of the love and grace of God, thereby proclaiming only half a gospel.

God warns of this in II Timothy 4:3,4: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

13:10. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

This is a reassuring statement that encourages believers to stand firm during the final tribulation period. God says in effect: "Don't give up. Satan's victory is only temporary. Vengeance is mine and Satan will get his comeuppance." You see, Satan is the one who has been leading mankind into captivity. He has been deceiving the world into rebelling against God, thereby causing all the unsaved to end up in hell. In these end-time days, he is even bringing the church into captivity.

But God reassures us here that come Judgment Day, Satan himself will go into captivity. He will be the eternal prisoner of God, and his prison cell will be the ever-burning lake of fire in hell.

Sword. The phrase "He that killeth with the sword", strictly speaking, refers to anyone who takes the life of another with a weapon. God uses the sword in the Bible as a proxy for all means of killing. Explaining why believers should submit to the ruling authority, for example, God says in Romans 13:4, "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

In short, God has not given the government the right to kill for nothing. Sometimes, it must execute those who have committed crimes that call for the death penalty. Executions, of course, are carried out not only by the sword, but also by hanging, firing squad, electric chair, and so on.

However, God also uses the sword to typify the wicked of the world. We see this dramatically in Luke 22. On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples in verse 36, "he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." When they said, "Lord, behold, here are two swords," He answered in verse 38, "It is enough."

Why did He tell the disciples to buy a sword? To fulfill prophecy. Jesus Himself explains in verse 37, "For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end." The Lord was quoting from Isaiah 53:12, which had prophesied that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors".

The wicked. The transgressors are the wicked, those who are in rebellion against God. We read in Proverbs 2:21,22: "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it." So, in that statement, Christ identified the sword with the wicked of the world. And in the context of Revelation 13, Satan, who rules the wicked world, is the one who kills with the sword.

Incidentally, Christ told the disciples to take two swords on the eve of His crucifixion also for symbolic reasons. At that moment in time, He was about to turn Himself over to the enemy. Remember when the Jewish leaders came to seize Him, Jesus said, "this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53)?

You see, the number two has to do with the church. During the three days and three nights when Christ was "in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40), the church was without its head; it came under the power of Satan.

But here in Revelation 13:10, God assures us that Satan will himself be killed with the sword. He will be killed, however, by the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

Patience and faith. After having declared that Satan will surely be judged, God goes on to say that this is a time that calls for patience and faith on the part of the saints. This exhortation applies, of course, mainly to us believers who are living during the end-time period. To us, it has been most agonizing to see churches all over the globe modifying the Word of God to please men, thereby preaching gospels that do not really bring salvation. And it has been terribly heartbreaking to realize that the chances of our unsaved loved ones becoming saved are rapidly evaporating.

This kind of acute spiritual distress is something believers in other ages have never experienced, and something none of the unsaved can understand. That is why the Lord warned that the great tribulation would be different from the trials that believers have faced in the past, and why we believers need great patience and faith to live through this period of great tribulation.

Lesson 21 for Revelation²¹, 13:11-18 ~ "Prophecies of Our Time"

13:11a. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth.

So far in Revelation 13 we've seen that the beast coming out of the sea represents Satan's rule primarily over the New Testament period. Now God begins to deal exclusively with Satan's activities in the end-time period that we are living in today. Before we go on, though, let's take another detour to Daniel because the Books of Daniel and Revelation supplement each other in many ways.

²¹ *New Life Digest*, First Quarter 2000. [Original Series – Revelation 13:11b-18 "The Master Deceiver", *NLD*, Jul-Sep 1991.]

Daniel 7

When we studied Revelation 13:2, we looked at Daniel 7:2-6 and saw that the **first three beasts** in that chapter were very similar to the beast that came out of the **sea** and spoken of earlier in this chapter. Now, we are going to find that the **fourth beast** of Daniel 7 corresponds directly to this beast that comes out of the **earth**.

Dan. 7:7: After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns.

Regarding this part of the Daniel 7 vision, the Bible itself has this to say:

Dan. 7:23: The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.

Like the beast that comes up from the earth, the fourth beast in Daniel 7 is diverse from the first three. It is "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly" and it has "great iron teeth" to devour the world. These descriptions underscore that Satan is far more powerful now than anytime earlier in the New Testament era.

This fourth beast is different from the first three also in that it has **ten horns**, symbolizing the completeness of Satan's power. Remember we saw in Revelation 13:1 that the ten horns were crowned? That's because a good part of this chapter focuses on Satan's strong rule during this final tribulation period.

The Little Horn

Dan. 7:8a: "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots..."

Among the ten horns, Daniel sees yet another horn. God's own explanation:

Dan. 7:24: And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.

In his song of praise, Zechariah the father of John the Baptist spoke of Christ as the "horn of salvation" (Luke 1:69). With Jesus being the Great Horn, Satan would be the **little horn**. Note that Dan. 7:8a says that the little horn came up **among** the ten, but verse 24 says that he shall rise **after** the ten kings. Taking them together, we see that the current powerful rule of Satan represents the closing climax of his overall dominion of the world.

Plucked up. What about the three horns that were plucked up by the roots?

First, the number three shows that it is something that serves God's purpose. Second, it ties back to an historical fact recorded in II Chronicles 36. Before the Babylonians finally entered and destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar had captured the last three kings of Judah – Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.

Since the conquest of Judah by Babylon prefigured the current takeover of the apostate church by Satan, the statement that "he shall subdue three kings" reiterates that the vision has to do with the final chapter of the church age.

Yet another beast. Thirdly, this reference to the three kings serves to link the fourth beast in Daniel 7 also to the beast in Revelation 17, because it also has seven heads and ten horns. Let's look briefly at a couple of verses there.

Speaking of the beast's **seven heads**, Revelation 17:10 says, "And there are seven kings:

five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space." As we noted before, together the seven heads (or kings) represent the whole span of Satan's rule. Hence, the last one, which was yet to come and continue a short space, must be Satan's final reign.

Verse 11 adds: "And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition." Though Satan is the eighth king, it explains here, he is nevertheless still part of the seven kings, because Satan's end-time dominance would still be a part of his overall reign allowed by God. After that, he will go to hell.

Eighth king. That he is also called the eighth king is where the Daniel 7 connection comes in. The fourth beast in Daniel 7 started with ten horns. The little horn that arises after them would have been the eleventh. But he has plucked up three kings, and so he becomes the eighth king.

By this linkage with Revelation 17, which clearly talks about the last stage of Satan's rule, we are further assured that Daniel 7 is talking about the final tribulation period.

Dan. 7:8b: "...and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.

The "eyes of man" are normally a picture of prophets bringing the gospel. In Isaiah 29, where God declared that He had brought spiritual blindness to Israel, He said in verse 10, "For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered." God equates "your eyes" with "the prophets and your rulers" there.

Here in Daniel 7:8, though, the eyes were in the little horn, which is Satan. As the phrase "speaking great things" means prophesying, the picture is that of Satan prophesying to the nations through false prophets preaching false gospels.

Once more, we find God's own commentary later in the chapter:

Dan. 7:25a: "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws."

The saints of the most High are the children of God. They are so inundated by false prophets that churchgoers begin to consider them the outsiders. The principle goals of Satan's teaching are "to change times and laws" of the Bible.

Changing times. Indeed, we have long entered this sad state of affairs. Over the past century, among the most widely promulgated doctrines on biblical time is that Judgment Day is at least a thousand years down the way. These doctrines come in many varieties. Some suggest that Christians will be secretly raptured long before the last day, others teach that they will be gathered by Christ just before the final tribulation. But they all insist that before Christ returns to judge the world, there will yet be a thousand-year golden age on this planet.

Such teaching is totally contrary to the Word of God. The Bible is very clear on the sequence of events that culminate in Christ's second coming. Toward the end of time, the world will become increasingly sinful. Then comes the final tribulation, which will be followed immediately by Christ's return.

The rapture of believers will be far from secret. We read in Matthew 24:30,31, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they

shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

To be witnessed by all, the rapture of God's elect will take place on the very last day of time, which will also be Judgment Day for the unsaved.

Changing laws. God's laws have been changed as well. Jesus says, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." The Bible also forbids divorced people from remarrying while their spouses are still living. But most congregations now have loopholes through which members are allowed to divorce, and divorced people to remarry.

Another law against which churches are openly rebelling is the one that forbids a woman to teach or have authority over men. In recent decades, virtually every denomination has been experiencing heavy pressure to allow women not only to teach men, but to be preachers and spiritual rulers. Some churches have even ordained homosexuals as pastors.

Dan. 7:21,25b: I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them...and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

To a great degree, Satan now prevails against the saints. Why is God telling us the same thing over and over again. Undoubtedly, He wants to make sure that we heed His warning. In the Old Testament, God also warned Israel time and time again of His pending judgment. We find those warnings in Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophetic books. But instead of repenting, the Israelites ridiculed and mistreated those prophets.

Three-and-a-half. We looked at "time and times and the dividing of time" when we studied Revelation 11, remember? It corresponds to the three and a half days when the dead bodies of the two witnesses lay in the street.

Thankfully, Satan's success lasts only a short space. A final victory for the Lord Jesus follows:

Dan. 7:9-11: I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame.

In this context, the thrones that were cast down are those of the eight kings. Together, they represent Satan's end-time rule. The Ancient of days who did sit, of course, is Eternal God. With fiery flame, He will judge the unsaved and will sentence Satan to eternal damnation.

Daniel 8

In the third year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel had another vision. That vision, recorded in Daniel 8, also relates to what we're studying here in Revelation 13. In the first part of that vision, the prophet saw a ram with two horns doing whatever it wanted to do. Then came a he goat which had a notable (or prominent) horn between his eyes. It fought and overcame the ram. Then:

Dan. 8:8: Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.

As in Daniel 7, God Himself explains what the vision represents...

Dan. 8:20-22: The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power.

The Medes and the Persians, pictured by the ram with two horns, conquered Babylon shortly after Daniel had seen that vision and became the dominant kingdom for about 200 years. But they, in turn, were conquered by Greece, the first king of which was Alexander the Great.

Secular history reveals that in only a few years, Alexander the Great conquered the known world of his day. But he died very young, in his early thirties. After that, the Grecian kingdom, divided among four generals, lost all its might.

All nations. In the Bible, nevertheless, the kingdom of Greece has continued to be highly relevant. Even though the Roman Empire was predominant when the New Testament was written, God typically uses the term "the Greeks" – not "the Romans" – to distinguish the Gentiles from the Jews.

Hence, "the four notable [kingdoms] toward the four winds of heaven" in Daniel 8:8 really represent all the nations of the world that have emerged after Alexander the Great. Only by understanding this can we find continuity in the prophecy of Daniel 8, because the rest of this vision pertains to the end of time.

Dan. 8:9,10: And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the pleasant land. And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them.

Here, God again paints a picture of Satan taking over the corporate church. In His commentary, though, He gives us some new details about this little horn:

Dan. 8:23: And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

In this end-time period, Satan is of fierce countenance and understands dark sentences. The only other time God uses the phrase "fierce countenance" in the Bible is Deuteronomy 28:49,50. Warning Israel of the curses for disobedience, He said: "The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young."

As it turned out, the nation of fierce countenance that ultimately destroyed Israel was Babylon, and Babylon, as we shall see in Revelation 17 and 18, typifies the kingdom of Satan. Thus, the king of fierce countenance refers to Satan himself.

Dark sentences. We read in Psalm 49:4: "I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp." Notice that God relates "dark saying" there to a parable. Parables are that which Jesus typically speaks in. Asked why He did not speak in easy-to-understand language, Jesus answered in Mark 4:11,12: "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."

Wise deceivers. Normally, therefore, only true believers can understand the Bible well; only they are enlightened by the Holy Spirit. During

the current final tribulation period, however, God has allowed Satan and his false prophets to understand dark sentences. They come as learned teachers and preachers of the gospel. Thus, Matthew 24:24 warns: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

Dan. 8:11,12 : Yea, he magnified himself even to the prince of the host, and by him the daily *sacrifice* was taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. And an host was given him against the daily sacrifice by reason of transgression, and it cast down the truth to the ground; and it practised, and prospered.

And here's God's own commentary:

Dan. 8:24: "And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people."

God is still pounding it in, warning again that in these end-time days, the devil's deception is succeeding in casting away the truth of the Bible.

Ever-burning light. But why does Daniel speak of Satan taking away the daily sacrifice? What has sacrifice to do with the final tribulation period as all animal offerings ceased after the cross?

The fact is, the word "sacrifice", italicized in the *King James Bible*, does not appear in the original manuscript. The "daily" that was taken away relates to the lamp that burnt continually in the temple. In fact, the Hebrew word for daily here, *tamid*, is usually translated "continual" or "continually" elsewhere in the Bible.

Back in Leviticus 24:2-4, God said to Moses, "Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually. Without the veil [outside the veil] of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the Lord continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the Lord continually."

You see, those lamps represent the light of the gospel. The true gospel is the "daily" that is taken away by Satan.

Self-deception. Of the devil at end-time, God says:

Dan. 8:25: "And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand."

Satan is the father of lies. Because of his craftiness in deception, his false gospels are widely perceived as the right way to gain peace with God. In reality, they are leading people to destruction. Satan even deceives himself into believing that he is more powerful than he really is. He has become so arrogant in his heart as to think that he is God. Thus, II Thessalonians 2:4 describes the devil as he "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." But Satan can go only so far as God allows him to go. On the last day, he will be broken – not by hand or any human force, but by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Having studied the beasts in Daniel 7 and 8, we are now better equipped to understand the rest of Revelation 13.

13:11b,12. And he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to

worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

From our study of Daniel 7, we have learned that this second beast, which comes out of the earth, represents Satan's especially strong rule during this final tribulation period. That he has two horns like a lamb and speaks as a dragon reaffirms that Satan is the Antichrist and that his false prophets come as ministers of Christ even though they are in fact speaking on behalf of the devil.

Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 24:23, "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not." In other words, if someone comes and says you can **feel** the presence of Christ in this church or that because the people there are so spirit-filled as they sing and dance, don't believe it. The lamb they are worshipping is really the dragon.

13:13. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

The ministers serving Satan operate as though they have special power from God. As II Corinthians 11:15 warns, they have been "transformed as the ministers of righteousness" by the devil.

Calling fire down. There is only one account in the Bible in which someone called fire down from heaven to destroy his enemy, and it's recorded in II Kings 1. There, we find the wicked king Ahaziah sending a captain with his fifty men to try to take Elijah. The prophet called fire down from heaven to consume them. The king then sent a second captain with his fifty men and they, too, were destroyed by fire from heaven. Elijah, you see, was a figure of the Lord Jesus there; and that confrontation was a picture of Christ vanquishing His enemies.

Falling Backward. But how can Satan make fire come down from heaven? The answer, I believe, is found in the direct association between the punishing power of God and all four accounts in the Bible of people falling backward:

(1) **Judas and the Temple Servants.** When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, the temple servants, led by Satan-indwelt Judas, came to arrest Him. Jesus asked them, "Whom seek ye?" and they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Then, we read in John 18:6, "As soon then as he had said unto them, I am *he*, they went **backward**, and **fell** to the ground." If Elijah could call fire down to destroy those who came to take him, surely Jesus could do that. He didn't, because He came to earth to be crucified. But by causing them to fall backward upon hearing the name "I AM", He demonstrated that He did have that divine power.

(2) **Eli, the High Priest.** In I Samuel 4 is the account of Israel being defeated by the Philistines. The enemy captured the ark and killed the two sons of Eli, the high priest. A Benjamite ran back to Shiloh and gave Eli the bad news. Verse 18 then reads, "And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he **fell** from off the seat **backward** by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died." As the high priest, Eli was Israel's representative before God. His falling backward upon hearing the news about the ark was thus a picture of the nation of Israel coming under the judgment of God.

(3) **Northern Kingdom.** In Isaiah 28, God warned that He would send a foreign nation to judge the Northern kingdom of Israel because of the latter's apostasy. He added in verse 13: "But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and **fall backward**, and be broken, and snared, and taken." In other words, God was saying, "Those people refuse to heed my warning. Instead of my whole Word, they just pick a verse here and a passage there. So, they

will fall backward and be broken, snared and taken prisoners."

(4) The Tribe of Dan. In Genesis 49, Jacob was telling his twelve sons that "which shall befall you in the last days" (v. 1). He said in verse 17: "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward." Dan and Ephraim are the two tribes that God conspicuously omitted from "all the tribes" of Israel listed in Revelation 7. They were used by God there to typify the false prophets that would arise from within the institutional church. In His prophecy, Jacob likened Dan to a serpent and an adder, both of which refer to Satan. That Satan would cause the rider to fall backward stresses that false prophets would snare their followers into damnation.

Misguided "blessing". This prophecy is indeed being fulfilled everywhere in our time. In churches that have been going after the signs-and-wonders gospels, a common phenomena is people falling over backward.

Ironically, those who fall over backward think that they have received a special blessing from God in that they have been slain by the Holy Spirit. The truth is, nothing in the Bible ever suggests that believers would experience such a "blessing". If anything, their falling back shows that they are under the judgment of God.

13:14a. And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast;

Tongues phenomenon. Besides causing people to fall over backward, Satan's workers deceive people through the tongues phenomenon. There are two kinds of speaking in tongues recorded in the Bible. In the Book of Acts, we find several accounts of believers suddenly having the ability to speak in a known foreign language. It was God's way of showing that the gospel had begun to go out to all nations.

The second kind involved speaking in an unknown language. It was one of the spiritual gifts that certain Corinthians had received. We read in I Corinthians 14:2, "For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." In verse 22 of the same chapter, God labeled this phenomenon of speaking in an unknown tongue as a "sign", or a miraculous event.

Satanic activity. A study of church history shows that this sign ceased shortly after the apostolic age. But in the last few decades, more and more churchgoers seem to have this gift again. The fact is, speaking in tongues is one of the miracles God allows Satan to deceive people with.

When the Bible was still being written, God did bring divine revelation via people speaking in unknown languages. When interpreted by those who had the gift of interpreting tongues, the messages served to edify the congregation.

Divine parameter. When God had finished writing the Bible, however, He declared in Revelation 22:18, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book."

In other words, God was saying, "I have written in the Bible all that I want mankind to know. From now on, any supernatural message you receive can only be from Satan. So, if you consider such a message to be divine and add it to my word, it would mean that you are not a child of mine, and I will punish you even more severely than I shall the average unsaved person."

God-given power. When it speaks of the power of the Holy Spirit, the Bible typically uses the Greek word *dunamis*. The word "power" that

Satan has in this verse is from the Greek *didomi*, which is normally translated "give". Meaning: Satan comes with signs and wonders in the end-time only because God has given him the right to break the silence between the supernatural and the natural.

When Jesus was ministering on earth, He attested to His deity by signs and wonders. To show that the apostles were God's servants, they were also empowered to do signs and wonders for a short period. At that time, Satan was not allowed to perform miracles so that people would not be confused as to where the supernatural power came from.

Not by sight. The apostles ceased to perform any such miracles once their credentials had been established. Believers have since been told to "walk by faith, not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7).

In fact, even before Christ ascended back to heaven, He had said, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). Earlier, when some of the Jewish leaders asked Him for a sign, He answered, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matt. 12:39).

The point is, seeing signs and wonders does not yield saving faith. The only supernatural thing God wants us to see is the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the miracle of the cross.

Testing program. Toward the end of time, however, fewer and fewer people will have saving faith. Like the Jews of Jesus' day, the unsaved will be interested primarily in seeing visible signs. And it is to test and judge the church that God will give Satan permission to increasingly do signs and wonders during that period.

Every biblical reference to signs and wonders in the end-time has to do with satanic activity. For example, Matthew 24:24 says, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

And in II Thessalonians 2:9,10, which speaks of Satan being revealed "with all power and signs and lying wonders" just before Judgment Day, we read: "Even him [the Lord Jesus Christ], whose coming is after [or against] the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

God is not the author of confusion. So, when He purposely allows Satan to do signs and wonders today, He Himself will not be doing them. Incidentally, the phrase "if it were possible" in Matthew 24:24 implies that it is not really possible for God's chosen to be deceived.

13:14b. saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

In the Old Testament, pagan worship was typically characterized by the worship of idols. We don't find much idol worship recorded in the New Testament. But there are repeated warnings against serving mammon, or money. The figure of making an image to the beast thus refers to worshipping anyone or anything other than God Himself. Colossians 3:5 elaborates, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

In other words, whenever we seek to satisfy our pleasure or sinful nature or to go after the things of this world, we are making an image to the beast.

13:15. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

Satan is also empowered by God to give life to the image, that is to enable false prophets to perform supernatural signs and wonders.

Remember we saw in Daniel 8 that the king of fierce countenance understands dark sentences? That is what this verse means by "the image of the beast should speak". The ministers working for Satan are able to preach the Word of God eloquently. But instead of the full counsel of God, they modify the gospel to appease and attract the unsaved. Gaining popularity by preaching what people with itching ears like to hear, these false prophets have been taking control of the corporate church, effectively killing thereby the voice of true believers.

13:16. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads:

To better understand this verse, let's look at Revelation 14:1, where the Apostle John sees in heaven the Lamb and the 144,000 "having his Father's name written in their foreheads". Those 144,000 represents all the saints. Which name of the Father is written in their foreheads? Jehovah? Jesus? Christ? The Word of God? The Lord of Hosts? All these are names of God; each gives us some insight into the character and attributes of God.

But none of them is really the name of God because God does not have a name as we do. We are given names to distinguish one from another. However, God alone is God. He does not need any name to identify Himself from other gods. In fact, we will find in Revelation 19 that God has a name that no man can know. You see, such terms as "the Father's name", "the name of God" and "the name of Christ" are all meant to denote everything that God is. So, having the Father's name on their foreheads is a figure showing that these are God's people.

By the same token, this verse is a figure of speech saying that Satan owns all the unsaved. He has placed his brand upon them, much as a rancher puts his brand on the cattle he owns.

Enslaved. It says here that the mark is in their right hand, or in their foreheads. As we've learned before, the right hand represents the will of a person; and the foreheads, his mind or his intellect. In either case, it means that the unsaved are surrendered to Satan. That's why no one can on his own decide to follow Christ. People become saved only because God has broken their bondage to Satan and has begun to incline their wills and draws them to Himself. Only God can act and save people.

13:17. And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

When we read the phrase "buy or sell", we immediately think of economic activities. But a person's salvation is not dependent on his financial ability to buy or sell. To learn what God has in view here, we again must compare Scripture with Scripture. We read in Mark 11:15: "And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves."

Notice it talks there about people that sold and bought in the temple. Verse 17: "And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves." Quoting from Jeremiah 7, the Lord Jesus, equates in that statement those who bought and sold to a den of thieves.

Den of thieves. Going back to Jeremiah 7, we read in verses 9 and 10: "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?"

God was faulting ancient Israel for having become spiritually adulterous. They burned incense unto Baal and walked after other gods, yet they dared to come into the temple and say, "We are God's people." So, God chided them by asking, "Do you think you are liberated to do all these terrible things?"

He continued in verse 11, "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers...?" That statement, which Jesus quoted in Mark 11, effectively identifies a den of robbers, or thieves, with unsaved people who come into the temple and say that they are saved. We thus see that those who "buy or sell" are synonymous to those who worship other gods and yet claim to be God's children.

In a nutshell, then, God is saying in Revelation 13:17: no one can worship Satan and still think that he is a child of God unless he has been branded and deceived by Satan.

13:18. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

The Greek phraseology for "it is the number of a man" can also be correctly written as "it is the number of man". You will see why the latter translation makes better sense once we have studied and understood what 666 means.

Throughout the New Testament era, theologians have tried all kinds of approaches to understand the number 666. Prevalent is the use of numerology – that is, using the numerical values assigned to the Greek, Roman or other alphabets. Supposedly, the name of the antichrist will be such that the values of all its letters add up to 666. There is no biblical authority, however, for using numerology to interpret Scripture. With reference to the Word of God, I Corinthians 2:13 says, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

To understand the symbols used in the Bible, we must find the answers from the Bible itself. I think the answer to 666 can be found in Zechariah 13. There, God declares in verses 8 and 9: "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God."

Two-to-one. Here, God divides the human race into two groups. The first group, represented by the figure two parts, comprises all the unsaved of the world. They shall be cut off and die. The other group, comprising all those whom He has chosen to save and whom He would call "my people", is symbolically identified as the third part.

Let me hasten to point out that these are symbolic fractions. We cannot infer from the statement that one-third of all the people that have ever lived will become saved. The Bible has made it very clear that only a remnant of the population is chosen by grace to be God's children. A remnant means just a tiny fraction. You may recall that when we studied Revelation 2:10 and 7:4, I noted that the number 1,000 represents the completion of God's plan. Well, two-thirds of 1,000 equals 666 in whole numbers. So, 666 is really the symbolic number that God has assigned to the unsaved of the world.

Confirmations. There are at least two other accounts in the Bible where God uses the two-to-one relationship to represent the unsaved and the saved. The first is in II Samuel 8. It begins by noting that David smote the Philistines and subdued them. Then verse 2 reads: "And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting

them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts."

Here we have another picture of salvation. David is a figure of Christ. Two thirds of the Moabites, who typified the unsaved, were put to death. One third were spared and they became the servants of David. We of course are the bond servants of Christ.

The second account is in II Kings 1. We made reference to this a little earlier when we talked about falling over backward. Remember Elijah called down fire from heaven and destroyed two captains with their companies of fifty men each? Well, the king sent a third captain with his fifty men to take Elijah. This group pleaded for mercy and they were spared. Thus, God again destroyed two-thirds, and saved one-third.

In this closing verse of Revelation 13, God is effectively issuing this warning: you need true wisdom. Things are not what they appear on the surface. Those who follow after the false gospels may think that they are worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ and are therefore saved. But they are really buying and selling in the temple; they are a den of robbers. They belong to the beast, because they are among the symbolic two-thirds that are unsaved.

Revelation 14

*Lesson 22 for Revelation 14:1-11 ~ "The Hour of Judgment"*²²

14:1. And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

As Chapter 14 opens, the Apostle John sees yet another vision, a more agreeable vision than the previous one. The vision of Revelation 13 featured the devastating work of Satan, as he is used by God to judge the church during the final tribulation period. This one highlights the triumph of the cross.

First, he sees a Lamb standing on Mount Sion. This Lamb, of course, is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is standing on Mount Sion, which is a figure of the Kingdom of God.

Standing with Him are 144,000. We first saw this number 144,000 in Revelation 7. We determined then that it is not literally the sum of 12,000 individual believers from each of the twelve tribes of national Israel; the number is symbolic. Reason: from the tribes that God listed following the statement "all the tribes of the children of Israel", conspicuously absent were the tribes of Dan and Ephraim.

All Believers. By carefully studying the prophesies in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, respectively, about the twelve tribes that were listed, we discovered then that they really related to the body of Christ. And so, we concluded that the number 144,000, which is 12 x 12 x 1000, really represents the fullness of both Old Testament and New Testament believers at the completion of God's salvation plan.

That they have the Father's name written in their foreheads, as we discussed at the end of our last study, stresses the fact that all those who have placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are identified with Jehovah God, their heavenly Father.

14:2. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great

thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

Whose voices are these? First, the voice from heaven is Christ's. From our earlier studies, we've learned that "the voice of many waters" is that of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:15). Likewise, when God speaks, especially when He speaks as the Judge, He thunders (10:3; 11:19).

The other voice, that of the harpers, comes from believers of the Lord Jesus Christ as they glorify and sing praises to Him. The Bible frequently uses the figure of harps in connection with God's people singing praises to Him.

We read in Psalm 33:2, for example: "Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings." Again, in Psalm 98:5, "Sing unto the LORD with the harp; with the harp, and the voice of a psalm." And also in Psalm 149:3: "Let them praise his name in the dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp."

14:3. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Who are the "they" in this statement? From the context of verses 1 and 2, it would appear that they are the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, and all those who have become saved. The Apostle John hears the voices of both God and the believers.

That God Himself sings praises is not new to us. During our study of Revelation 5, you may recall, we read in Zephaniah 3:17, "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

New song. What new song are the believers singing? We find a reference to it in Psalm 98:1-2:

O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvelous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.

The new song is one that praises God for His marvelous salvation plan, His victory over Satan.

Another reference to a new song appears in Psalm 40:1-3:

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.

Here, the Psalmist explains that the new song that God has put in his mouth is a song praising God for having delivered him out of an horrible pit and the miry clay, both of which point to hell, and for having set his feet upon the rock, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers only. Note that the singing in the vision takes place before the throne and before the four beasts (living creatures) and the elders. This is much like the throne scene we saw back in Revelation 5. We learned then that both the throne and the four living creatures are figures of God Himself, and that the four and twenty elders, like the 144,000, represent all who have become saved out of the human race. They're all praising the Lamb that was slain for His worthiness.

Why is it that no man other than the saints could learn that song? Because this is a song of praise for the wonderful salvation that God has provided. The unsaved person has never experienced salvation. He can never understand, let alone appreciate, what Christ did for His people at the cross.

²² *New Life Digest*, Second Quarter 2000 [Original Series – Revelation 14:1-11 "The Hour of Judgment", *NLD*, Fourth Quarter 1991.]

But don't we often hear "Thank God" or "Praise the Lord" flowing from the lips of those who follow gospels other than that of the Bible? Yes, but they are not singing the new song. They may have been taught by their church that Christ was crucified for the sins of sinners, or they may have been intrigued by some signs and wonders that they saw, but that doesn't mean that they have become saved. Without understanding the true gospel, they cannot really know what salvation is all about.

Come Judgment Day, even unbelievers will have to worship and give glory to God, as we'll see just a little later. But it will be too late for them to repent and put their trust in Christ. They will never be able to learn to sing this new song of praise for salvation.

14:4. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

How can God say here that not a single believer has ever committed fornication or adultery in his life and that every one of them is a virgin? Well, David was clearly a child of God, and yet he surely committed adultery. But God is using a figure of speech here. This parabolic statement refers to the spiritual condition of those who have become saved.

In the Bible, God uses men who run after harlots or their neighbor's wife to picture those who are guilty of spiritual fornication or adultery. They are said to have defiled themselves with other women.

Spiritually, all believers are regarded as virgins by God on two counts. First, no matter how spiritually defiled we might have been before we were saved – worshipping money and things of the world, if not bowing down to literal idols – we became a new creature in Christ at the moment of our salvation. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (I Cor. 5:17). We become totally pure in God's eyes because we are covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness.

Secondly, once we have become a true child of God, we just do not run after gospels other than the gospel of the Bible. It's not that we ourselves are holy. But we are held by Jesus Christ. It is He who keeps us from being snared by false religions and false prophets. And so, we have not defiled ourselves with women.

Followers of Christ. And that's the same reason why we read in this verse that believers are "they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth". We who have become saved surrender our entire life to Christ. As a result, we know that He, being our Lord, is in total control of us. We obey the Word of God as we are led by the Holy Spirit, and we are content with whatever lot He has given us. We follow Him because we know that He holds our future and that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

But we are followers of Christ in another sense also. Christ came to earth, among other things, to seek and to save the lost sheep. We now follow His footsteps in keeping His program of evangelizing the world going by doing our part in sending forth the gospel into all nations.

Those who follow the Lamb were redeemed from among men, it says here. In other words, the 144,000 does not in any way symbolize the whole human race. This reiterates the important truth that Christ did not die on the cross for the sins of every last human being. He came to save His people.

Limited atonement. Many people read II Peter 3:9 and preach that Christ died for everyone on the cross, and that God is now patiently waiting for people to accept Him. That verse reads:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but

is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

If you read that verse carefully, you will notice that it speaks of the Lord being longsuffering to us-ward. The "us-ward" there refers to all believers. This epistle, in fact, is directed mainly to Christians, as God exhorts them to overcome temptations and endure suffering while they are waiting on earth for Christ to return.

And so, II Peter 3:9 is simply saying that the Lord has tarried because He is not willing that any of those whom He had committed to save should perish, but that all of the chosen of God should come to repentance.

The next verse, verse 10, promises that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. Will Christ be returning as a thief because He has finally lost His patience and decided that enough is enough? Of course not; God never changes. No, the day of the Lord will come only because by then all of God's elect will have been redeemed from among men.

Firstfruits. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits were the initial harvest that was brought to the temple as sacrifices. Those firstfruits typified those who have become saved and have been brought into the Kingdom of God. We read in James 1:18:

Of his own will [God's will, that is] begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

We are a kind of firstfruits because Christ is the firstfruits. We read in I Corinthians 15:22-23:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Remember, believers are joint heirs with Christ. As He is the firstfruits by virtue of His having risen from the dead, we will all become the firstfruits when we are resurrected on the Last Day.

14:5. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

The word "guile" means "lie" or "deceit", and the very essence of Satan is lie and deceit. All unsaved people, being slaves of Satan, naturally engage in lying and deception. In John 8:44, Jesus says to the Jews:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

In John 1, when the Lord Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said in verse 47, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Did He mean that Nathanael had never told a lie in his life? Of course not. What Christ meant was that Nathanael, having become saved, was no longer under the rulership of the devil, the father of lies. He was looked upon by God as if he had never lied or practiced deceit.

This holds true for all those who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the mouth of the saints that John saw, therefore, was found no guile. As children of God, meanwhile, they do have an earnest desire in their present life to always tell the truth. This is characteristic of a true believer.

Without fault. Because Christ has redeemed us from our sins, washed us with His blood, we believers will also be without fault before the throne of God on Judgment Day. God speaks of this in Ephesians 5.

Starting with verse 22, God begins to talk about the Christian family. He first commands wives to submit to their husbands in accordance with the line of authority He has set up. Then, He likens the husband-and-wife relationship to that of

Christ and the church, saying:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (vv. 25-27).

Having been cleansed and sanctified by Christ, the church – the body of believers – can thus stand without fault before the throne of God.

14:6. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

So far in this vision, John has seen the Lamb, the four living creatures, and the various representations of the body of believers – the 144,000, the harpists, and the elders. No mention of his seeing any angels has been made, however. Yet, this verse says that he now sees "another" angel.

Well, once we remember that the Greek word for "angel" can also be correctly translated "messenger", then we understand why the word "another" is used here. John sees another messenger because all of the believers he has seen are messengers of the gospel.

As a matter of fact, this other messenger is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Messenger. Why do I say that? Well, as we go through Revelation 14, we shall find five more references to "another angel" – in verses 8, 9, 15, 17 and 18.

In addition, verse 14 speaks of "a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man..." and that has to be Christ. Altogether, then, from this point forward, this chapter will be talking about the activity of seven individual messengers on Judgment Day.

Perfection. The number seven alone, which stands for perfection, suggests that these seven messengers are a picture of Christ. Remember back in Revelation 4:5 and 5:6, we read of "the seven Spirits of God"? That expression represented the perfection of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is eternal God, even as the Lord Jesus is eternal God.

Again and again in Revelation, God uses the number seven to underscore the perfection of God's plan. The seven seals that were opened, for example, pointed to the perfection of God's salvation program; and the seven trumpets that sounded represented the perfection of God's judgment – first on the church, then on the nations.

But more than that, I am convinced that these other "angels" are Jesus Himself because of what they are doing. As we read carefully over the activity that they are engaged in, particularly that of the last three, we'll find language that can apply only to the Lord Jesus Christ on Judgment Day.

Master Preacher. Here in verse 6, for example, this messenger is described as having "the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

If there is any one person who can be credited for having preached the everlasting gospel to the world, it has to be Christ. He left heaven to come to earth not only to make the gospel possible by dying on the cross, but to preach the gospel as well.

Notice that the number four, which stands for universality, is featured in this statement – nation, kindred, tongue and people. This underscores that it has always been Christ's plan to evangelize the whole world.

Indeed, since Pentecost, when that program was officially launched, it is Christ who has been

seeing to it that the gospel is preached to all nations. "I will build my church," Jesus said, remember? Though He Himself is in heaven, He has been using us believers to spread the gospel. "As the Father has sent me, so send I you." Christ is the Master Builder; He is the Master Preacher.

14:7a. Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come:

Don't forget that this vision is about the end of time, when Christ will have completed His program of saving the elect. No one else is left to be saved. So, He is saying with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come." What a mighty statement!

Most pastors like to talk about the Good News of Jesus Christ; they love to tell everyone, "God loves you!" But very few nowadays bother to tell people why they need to be saved. They avoid the subject of eternal damnation for sinners because they are afraid to offend their listeners. "You can't scare anyone into heaven," they insist. That's utter nonsense! They think they are wiser than God!

Note that the very first statement that the Lord makes is: "Fear God, and give glory to him." Why? "For the hour of his judgment is come." God is telling us in no uncertain terms that Judgment Day is coming.

If we are still unsaved, we'd better be frightened right out of our skin. We'd better be so scared of having to spend eternity in hell that we repent this very moment and cry out to God for mercy. We have no assurance that we'll be alive the next hour. The Bible warns, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). If we die unsaved, the next conscious thing we know is that we are standing before God for judgment.

14:7b. And worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

The unsaved of the world don't worship God now. They don't recognize Him as the Creator. But come Judgment Day, when Christ commands them to worship God the Creator, they will do so whether they like it or not.

This is underscored in Philippians 2:10, where we read:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The problem, as I noted earlier, is that on Judgment Day, when they finally worship God and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, it will be too late for them to become saved. The day of salvation will have passed; they will all have to go to hell for their sins.

Fountains of waters. Having described God as the One who made heaven and earth and the sea, this verse goes on to say that He made the fountains of waters. The latter, I believe, is a parabolic expression that represents the gospel. This is a figure God uses frequently. "He that believeth on me," Jesus says in John 7:38, "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

He also declares in John 4:14:

Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

So, this verse is teaching that not only did the Lord Jesus create the universe, He also made salvation possible. He is the author and finisher of our faith; He made the fountains of waters.

14:8. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

This is the second "angel" that is really Christ and He is saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city."

Babylon, as we learned when we studied the nature of the final tribulation, is a figure of the whole kingdom of Satan. We can see this most clearly in Isaiah 14. In the midst of condemning "the king of Babylon", God begins to talk about Lucifer in verse 12, saying that he was cut down to the ground because he had wanted to be like God. Lucifer, of course, is Satan himself.

In this age, especially during the final tribulation period, Satan often appears to have the upper hand. But come Judgment Day, Christ will be the ultimate victor. By saying "is fallen" twice, the Lord underscores that His final victory over Babylon, the dominion of Satan, will surely come to pass.

Fornication. When we get to verse 10 a little later, we'll see that the expression "the wine of the wrath" refers to God's judgment. We'll study that wine in more detail then. But notice here that this wrath is associated with fornication.

As they are used in the Bible, both fornication and adultery refer to sexual acts that are immoral, regardless of whether the people involved are married or not. Because the marriage relationship is a very personal and highly intimate one, God frequently uses it to picture the believer's relationship with Him. By the same token, He uses fornication and adultery to describe spiritual flirtation with Satan, whether or not the people involved are supposed to be spiritually married to God, as ancient Israel was.

A good sample of God's hatred against fornication is found in the Book of Nahum. There, God was making an indictment against the City of Nineveh, a representation of the world of Satan. We read in verses 4 and 5 of Chapter 3:

Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame.

Back in Revelation 2, you may recall, God described the woman Jezebel as one who "callest herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication..." Later on in Revelation 17, we're going to read more about a great whore, the mother of harlots, which is a figure taken from Nahum of Satan's dominion.

Perhaps the best place where we can find God's own definition of spiritual adultery is James 4:1-4. It reads:

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

In short, to be a friend of the world system is to engage in spiritual adultery. God has created man to be the friend of God. This same truth is stated in I John 2:15 this way:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Because Satan has caused all nations to love the things of the world, he has effectively made them drink of the wine of the wrath of "her"

fornication.

14:9,10a. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation;

We've learned from our recent studies that the beast is Satan, that his image is any gospel other than the true one of the Bible, and that all the unsaved have Satan's mark on their foreheads or in their hands. So, God is warning in this verse that every unsaved person will receive the wrath of God on Judgment Day. There simply will not be any exception.

Wine is used here as a figure of the wrath of God. It is poured out into the cup of His indignation without mixture, which means without any dilution. There will not be any reduction in the penalty demanded by God's justice. Every single sin of every unsaved person must be paid for in full.

A hint of the horror of God's wrath was given by the Lord Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane. With sweat falling down as it were great drops of blood, He fell on His face and cried out, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Mat. 26:39). What cup? The cup of the wine of the wrath of God that was poured out without mixture.

As our sin bearer, the Lord was about to suffer the wrath of God on our behalf. So horrifying was the sheer prospect of it that He, Eternal God Himself, had to cry out again and again and again, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

But Christ was faithful and obedient. He went to the cross the next morning so that we who believe in Him will not have to go to hell. Oh, the supreme love of Christ! Oh, the amazing grace of Eternal God!

14:10b. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

Implicit in the word "tormented" is terrible suffering. I've heard people say glibly, "My God is a loving God. He would never torment a human being; He won't send anyone to hell." Well, God is saying right here that He certainly will.

Here in this verse, God uses the phrase "fire and brimstone" to represent hell. This ties back to Genesis 19, where God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone. Elsewhere in the Bible, God uses many other figures of speech to describe hell. Among them are: a lake of fire, outer darkness, a place where the worm dieth not, a place where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth and so on. The sum total of this parabolic language: hell is super terrible, super awful.

Holy judges. The unsaved are being tormented in the presence of the holy angels, as well as the Lamb. The holy angels here could again be a reference to the believers. The 144,000, remember, are present in this vision. Certainly, we believers will take part in the judging process. You read about that in I Corinthians 6:2-3.

We may wonder how we can possibly stand in judgment over our fellow humans, committing them to such a horrible punishment, when some of them may even be our friends, relatives and loved ones. Well, in our present frame of mind, we can't; and in our present state, we indeed mustn't. We are to love our fellow men and desire their salvation.

But when we receive our spiritual bodies, our salvation will be consummated. We shall then be totally separated from the human race, and our frame of mind will be like that of God's. At any rate, we'll face that when we get there. All we need to know now is that God's plan is

perfect in every respect.

14:11. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

This is one of those passages found throughout the Scriptures declaring that punishment in hell is forevermore. We read also in Matthew 25:46, "And these [the unsaved] shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."

You see, the punishment for the unsaved is no less everlasting than the life of the believers is eternal. Hell is not annihilation! When God says that sinners shall perish, He is not saying that they will simply be burned up to a crisp and come to an end. It is eternal damnation. Their torment goes on for ever and ever.

This verse concludes by reiterating that the ones who will be judged when Christ returns are all those who worship the beast and his image, and have received the mark of his name. In other words, all the unsaved. Only those who have truly trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior can escape the horror of Judgment Day. Be sure you are among them.

Lesson 23 for Revelation 14:12-20 ~ "The Harvest of the Earth"²³

14:12. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

In verse 11, God has just said that the torment of the unsaved will be for ever and ever; they will have no rest day nor night. Against that background, God is saying to believers here, "Knowing that you have become saved and have found rest in Christ, you saints can patiently wait for the end."

Yes, in this life we have tribulation; we face all kinds of trouble. We'll be persecuted, especially when we strive to be faithful to the word of God. We even have to struggle with our own sinful nature. But compared to the horrible, eternal torment we would have to endure had God not saved us, our current trials and struggles are really nothing. We can be patient.

The saints are described here as "they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." We do not keep the commandments of God, of course, to prove that God was right in having shown mercy to us. Rather, we do so because we have an earnest desire within us to be obedient; we are grateful and we want to please our Savior with our lives.

What is "the faith of Jesus" that we keep? It's His faithfulness in obeying God, in being obedient even unto the death of the cross. As a child of God, we want to imitate Christ. True, we can never be nearly as obedient as Christ was. But we do have a sincere desire to keep that faith.

14:13a. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth.

This is one of those beautiful statements that assure believers that they never have to fear death. As a matter of fact, physical death is a great blessing.

For one thing, we don't ever have to face Judgment Day. True, it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment (Heb. 9:27). But in Christ, we have already been judged and punished at the cross. Moreover, death is that wonderful moment when we leave

our body and go to live and reign with Christ in heaven. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

The phrase "from henceforth" in this verse does not imply in any way that somehow those who had previously died in the Lord were not blessed. But you see, God is holding out this measure of comfort to encourage the saints who are still living on this earth of pain and sorrow. Those who have already died don't need this assurance; they are already in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ.

14:13b. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Once we are saved, we are assigned tasks to do. Our most important work is to bring the gospel to the lost world. "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you." But as soon as we have finished the work that is assigned to us individually, we are called home to be with the Lord. That's the blessed moment when our death comes. We then rest from our labor.

When we die, we cannot take anything from this earth with us. Naked we came out of our mother's womb, and naked shall we return thither. But our works for the kingdom of God do follow us. Those who have become saved as a result of our sending forth the gospel will also appear in heaven.

Luke 16:9 presents this very truth interestingly. There Jesus says:

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

The mammon of unrighteousness is the wherewithal, the money, that we now have, and the Lord tells us to make friends of it. What kind of friends? Friends that have become saved, because it says here, "when ye fail [that is, when your ability to make still more friends has finally ceased], they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

In other words, your works will follow you in the sense that when you go to heaven, you will be greeted by those who have become saved as a result of your having been faithful in sending forth the gospel with the money that God has entrusted to you.

Second meaning. Revelation 14:13, I believe, has another meaning that may even be more important in the context than the first one. You see, when a person becomes saved, his old self dies spiritually in the Lord. We read about that in Romans 6:7-8, "For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Likewise, we read in Colossians 3:3, "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

In other words, we have died to self. We have crucified the flesh. And when we are dead in the Lord in this sense, we rest from our labors. We no longer try to work to earn our salvation; we rest in the finished work of Christ.

Here, our works also follow us. We read in Ephesians 2:8-10:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

What are these good works? The things that we do as we live in obedience to Christ. As we do our share in building up the body of Christ, our works do follow us.

14:14. And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

So far in Revelation 14, we have seen three angels, or rather three messengers, and we saw that all of whom are pictures of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, this fourth being is without any question Christ Himself.

For one thing, the phrase "like unto the Son of man" directly identifies with the Lord. Secondly, the golden crown on His head signifies that He is the One who reigns as the King. And thirdly, the sharp sickle has to do with harvesting. It is harvest time and Christ is coming back to harvest. When we get to Revelation 19, we'll see this truth even more clearly.

And He is coming to judge; He is sitting upon the cloud. As I pointed out in earlier studies, "cloud" or "clouds" in the Bible often has to do with Christ coming in glory as Judge. Don't ever forget it! A day of retribution will come, and the Lord Jesus Christ will be the Judge!

Oh! It is so popular today to talk about the love of God, about how wonderful it is to be a Christian. But, as I've said so many times, preachers and evangelists nowadays hardly talk about hell and damnation. That subject, they say, is offensive to their listeners. Well, God doesn't think so. As we have gone along through Revelation 14, we have found God using one figure after another to speak of eternal damnation. God does not want us to ever forget that Christ will surely return one day to judge the unsaved for their sins.

14:15,16. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

This statement proves that all the messengers in this chapter are indeed Christ Himself. Why? Because this person is telling the Lord Jesus in a loud voice to "thrust in thy sickle". No angel may ever order God to do anything. Christ is the Master. He is the King of kings, whereas angels are just ministering spirits sent forth to minister for the saints (Heb. 1:14).

Harvesting is frequently used in the Bible to signify the end of the world. Jesus says, for example, in Matthew 13:24-30:

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares [that is, weeds] among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Later, beginning in verse 37, Jesus explains what that parable means. The weeds are the unsaved of the world. They are first taken out of this earth and cast into hell. Then God completes the salvation of the believers, represented by the wheat, by creating a new heaven and a new earth in which they will forever be in the presence of God.

When will all this take place? Jesus says in verses 39 and 40:

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares

²³ *New Life Digest*, Third Quarter 2000 [Original Series – Revelation 14:12-20 "The Harvest of the Earth", *NLD*, First Quarter 1992.]

are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

Here again, incidentally, the word "angels" would have been more correctly translated "messengers", because angels will not be doing any judging on the last day. Nowhere in the Bible do we read that angels will sit in judgment over anyone. But we do read in I Corinthians 6:2-3: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?...Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

Ripe for harvest. What does it mean that the earth was ripe? It is ripe because all the chosen of God have at last become saved. The earth is also ripe because the iniquity of the world has become so utterly bad that it is time for judgment. And so, the earth was reaped.

14:17. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

This messenger is again a picture of Christ. But why is God stating here again that He is coming with a sharp sickle? He has already said so in verse 14. Answer: for emphasis.

Back in Genesis 41, there is an account of Pharaoh having two dreams. He first saw seven skinny cows eating up seven fat cows that had first come up from the river. Then he saw seven skinny ears of corn eating up seven fat ears of corn that had previously been grown. Joseph later interpreted those dreams for Pharaoh, saying that seven years of famine would come upon Egypt after seven years of great harvest and that the famine would be so severe as to more than exhaust the abundance of the good years.

Then, in verse 32, Joseph said, "And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass." In that statement, God laid down a principle that whenever something is doubled in the scriptures, it will surely come to pass, because it has been established by God.

Of course, even when something is stated only once in the Bible, it is still the Word of God and it is going to happen. But God, in His condescending mercy, doubles His statements from time to time to make sure that we really get the message. Here in Revelation, God wants to drive it home to us that Judgment Day is very close at hand. Once we have entered the "last days" – that is, the final age of this earth's existence – the return of Christ is not far away.

It says here that Christ, having a sharp sickle, came out of the temple which is in heaven. This ties back to Micah 1:2-4:

Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.

That language, of course, has to do with judgment. Jehovah God will come down from His holy temple in heaven to bring His judgment.

14:18. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

In this verse, the altar from which Christ came out underscores that Christ, coming now as the Judge, was Himself judged by God for the sins of His people. He was the sacrificial Lamb of God. He has power over fire because He is the One who decides when Judgment Day comes and how the nations are to be judged. He has total control of all the events of the last day.

Again, He cries, "Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her

grapes are fully ripe." The time has come for God's justice to be satisfied. The day of salvation is gone; Judgment Day has come.

14:19. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

God finally thrusts in His sickle into the earth. He casts the unsaved of the earth into the winepress of the wrath of God. We read about another winepress in Isaiah 63:3-5:

I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.

In that statement, God identifies Himself with the winepress. As our redeemer, He had endured the wrath of God; He suffered all by Himself. His garments were stained with blood. Because He had to be punished fully for our sins, no unsaved person can now escape the wrath of God for his sins.

14:20. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

Remember Jesus was crucified without the City of Jerusalem? He was a castaway. Before the cross, you see, that city was a representation of the Kingdom of God. Likewise, all the unsaved will be cast out of the city on the last day. This time, however, the city represents the spiritual city of God, the kingdom of Christ. They are trodden outside heaven. They will suffer eternal damnation outside the presence of God. Even as Christ had to shed His blood on the cross, the unsaved will now have to shed their blood. It came out of the winepress. That again is a picture of the horror of Judgment Day.

In the Bible, the horse is often used as a picture of strength. For example, Psalm 33:17 says, "An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." In other words, the strength in which the unsaved man puts his trust will not be able to save him. We can be saved only by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In one sense, therefore, the picture of blood coming out "even unto the horse bridles" means that when Judgment Day comes, all of the strength of the unsaved will avail nothing. It will be flooded by their blood of punishment; it will be overwhelmed by the wrath of God.

But another sense is also in view here. Later on, when we get to Revelation 19, we'll see Christ coming on the clouds of glory riding on a white horse. The believers that follow Him will also be riding on white horses. They are figures indicating that Christ and the saints will come as victorious conquerors.

It will be such a massacre, figuratively speaking, that the blood of the unsaved will rise unto the bridles of their horses. No doubt about it, the judgment that Christ will bring on the last day will be fierce. It will be super horrible.

1,600 furlongs. A furlong is about a ninth of a mile. Whether there is any immediate significance in the word "furlong" I am not sure. But I can see significance in the number "one thousand, six hundred." It is a product of 4 x 4 x 100. The number "four" signifies universality; and the number 100, the completeness of whatever God has in view. So, here we have a number indicating that this Judgment Day is worldwide, and that God will bring it to its absolute completion. No one will escape. We read about this in Matthew 24:30

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And we also read in John 5:28-29:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

It's going to be a massive judgment. Billions of people, individually but nevertheless in totality, are going to stand for judgment – all the unsaved people that have ever lived in this earth. And they will all be sentenced to spend eternity in hell. They will all be tormented for ever and ever.

Beloved, I'm afraid Revelation 14 has not been a pleasant chapter to study. With the exception of just a couple of verses, this chapter has repeatedly talked about Christ coming to judge the world. Some of the language God uses is ugly – "tormented with fire and brimstone" and "blood came out of the winepress", for example. We would enjoy much more studying those parts of the Bible that speak of God's love, God's mercy and God's grace.

But the warning that Judgment Day is coming must be said. We are commanded by God to present the full counsel of God, and that includes warning the lost of the world of hell and damnation. Time is running out. So, while it is still called Today, let's get on with the task that God has assigned us with great urgency. Let's do all we can to inform people of the horror of hell and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 15

*Lesson 24 for Revelation 15:1-8 ~ "Preparing to Judge"*²⁴

15:1. And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

The Apostle John now has a brand new vision. He sees seven angels.

To correctly understand this vision, we should first determine whether these "angels" are literally angels, or whether they are messengers. There is a difference, is there not? An angel is a ministering spirit sent forth on behalf of believers, whereas a messenger can be an angel, or Christ Himself, as we saw in Chapter 14, or a believer bringing the word of God.

Well, these "angels" are actually believers, people who have become saved. Let me show you how we can be certain of that.

First, verse 7 of this chapter reads, "And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever." These, of course, are the same seven that John sees here in verse 1.

Of the same group. Going to Revelation 21, we read in verse 9:

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

We don't yet know who this angel or messenger is, but we do know from this verse that he is one of the seven that have been given the seven vials in Revelation 15:7. Of this same person, the Apostle John writes:

²⁴ *New Life Digest*, Fourth Quarter 2000 [Original Series – Revelation 15:1-8 "Victorious Saints", *NLD*, Second Quarter 1992.]

And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. (21:15)

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. (22:1)

And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. (22:6)

The Apostle John then describes his reaction in Revelation 22:8:

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.

He is overwhelmed by what this messenger has shown and told him. And he starts to worship him.

Fellowservant. Now, notice the next verse:

Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not [that is, don't worship me]: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

There you have it! God has declared to us in no uncertain terms that these seven messengers are believers that are in heaven. To avoid confusion, therefore, I am going to substitute the word "messenger" for the word "angel" wherever it appears in this and the next two chapters since these three chapters are all speaking about this same vision.

The last part of this verse reads, "for in them is filled up the wrath of God". It means that in the seven last plagues is the complete fulfillment of the wrath of God. They mark the consummation of God's judgment.

15:2. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

This scene, as verse 1 puts it, is great and marvellous because it focuses on the victory that the Lord Jesus Christ has given all the believers.

To start with, there was "a sea of glass mingled with fire". We came across a heavenly sea of glass back in Revelation 4:6, remember? We read there:

And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

I pointed out then that it was a reference to the "molten sea" in the Old Testament temple. To refresh your memory, let's go to II Chronicles 4, where we read in verses 2 and 5:

Also he [Solomon, that is] made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about...And the thickness of it was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies; and it received and held three thousand baths [of water].

A cubit is equivalent to about one-and-a-half feet; and a bath, nine gallons of water. Thus, this sea of cast metal approximates 15 feet in diameter and 7.5 feet deep. It had a circumference of about 45 feet, and it could hold some 18,000 gallons of water.

Washing by fire. Why did God want that huge basin put in the temple? Verse 6 explains, "the sea was for the priests to wash in."

The washing, of course, immediately ties us to the atonement provided for us by the Lord Jesus Christ as He went through hell fire for our sins. We believers have been made kings and priests

unto God, remember? That's why the sea that John sees here is mingled with fire.

That it was a "molten" sea also points to the atonement. To be liquefied for casting, the metal must have been heated by intense fire. The hell fire that Christ later endured, nevertheless, would be infinitely more intense.

Sea of glass. The sea that John sees in heaven, however, is a sea not of water, but of glass. Why? In the Bible, glass is a symbol of purity. In Revelation 21, where God talks about the New Jerusalem, we read in verse 18, "And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass."

Unlike the human priests in the Old Testament temple, who had to wash themselves over and over again, Christ, by going to the cross once, has once for all purified all those whom He came to save. He endured the equivalent of every believer being eternally punished in hell. No further washing is necessary.

Victorious believers. Standing on this sea of glass, therefore, are "them that had gotten the victory over the beast" and so on. The beast, as we have seen in the last few chapters, is Satan, and the "them" that have gotten victory over it are the believers.

We are victorious over Satan's image also because false gospels can no longer snare us: over his mark because Satan can no longer put his brand on us; and over the number of his name because the number 666, which God assigned symbolically to the unsaved of the world (Rev. 13:18), no longer applies to us.

Standing on the atonement effected by Christ, these victorious believers are seen to have "harps of God". As they did in Revelation 14:2,3, where they were described as harpers, they are about to sing a song of praise to God.

15:3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

In the Old Testament, there are two accounts of Moses singing praises to God. Those two songs are much longer (comprising 19 and 43 verses, respectively) than this one here (only two verses). Why then does this verse say that they sing the song of Moses? Answer: Because they are singing the same kind of praises.

Let's look briefly at the songs that Moses sang. The first is recorded in Exodus 15:1-19. It is a beautiful song. Let me just quote the first four verses:

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red sea.

Moses sang that song right after God had delivered the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. God had parted the Red Sea, thereby enabling them to go across it on dry land. Then, when the Egyptian horsemen and chariots went into the sea in pursuit, God drowned them by letting the water flow back to its place.

That stupendous victory is a picture of God delivering His spiritual children from their bondage to sin and Satan. And the Red Sea that drowned the host of Pharaoh is a picture of the hell that Satan and all of his host must go to on the last day.

Parting words. The second song of Moses is recorded in the first 43 verses of Deuteronomy

32. Moses spoke the words of that song to Israel at the end of his life. God was about to have him die on Mount Nebo. Again, let's read just the first four verses:

Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.

As these verses show, the song begins with Moses pictured as the word of God, praising the name of the LORD and the work of the Rock. It then goes on to describe how God took and nourished Israel, how He cared for them even though they repeatedly rebelled against Him, and how He finally brought judgment against their enemies. In short, it praises God for His merciful and magnificent salvation program.

Thus, as these believers in heaven sing the "song of Moses the servant of God", they are praising God for having saved them. Their salvation, of course, was made possible by Christ's sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Hence, what they are singing is also called "the song of the Lamb".

Just and true. This song in Revelation 15 begins with these beautiful words: "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

Certainly, the works of God are great and marvellous, and His ways are just and true. That God is just is especially praiseworthy. Because He is a just God, He cannot allow Himself to forgive sinners just by divine mandate. To meet the demands of His Law and to satisfy His justice, He sent His only begotten Son to pay for the penalty of the sins of all those whom He had chosen to save.

They are also praising God for being true. Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth and the life." It means that anything and everything that God has declared will come to pass. Even from the foundations of the earth, God had chosen the specific people whom He would save, and by the time Judgment Day comes, all of them shall have become saved.

15:4. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

In this age, only we believers fear and glorify the name of God. That's because God has inclined our hearts to believe what the Bible declares. Once the fact that mankind is under the wrath of God penetrates our sin-deadened souls, we begin to fear God. We humble ourselves and repent, beseeching God for His forgiveness.

Not so with the unsaved. As Romans 3:16-18 states, "Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes."

But they won't get away with it. Come Judgment Day, this song declares, "all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." God's judgments will surely be made manifest when everyone that has ever lived on this earth stands before the judgment throne.

15:5. And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

What temple is this that is opened? Certainly not the Old Testament temple that stood in Jerusalem. At the moment Christ died on the cross, its usefulness to the kingdom of God ceased.

Note that this temple is called the tabernacle of the testimony. As such, it primarily represents

the Lord Jesus. Remember Jesus referred to Himself as the temple? He said in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus is also the testimony. At the very beginning of Revelation, John introduced the book as "the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1:2).

The Lord is also the One who first came with the testimony of the kingdom of God. We read in John 3:31,32:

He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.

Believers. Nevertheless, the Bible also describes the body of believers as the temple. In I Corinthians 3 and 6, for instance, every individual believer is said to be a temple of God. And Ephesians 2:21 describes believers collectively as a holy temple in the Lord.

And every believer is commissioned to bring the testimony of Christ to the unsaved. Thus, the Apostle Paul writes in I Corinthians 2:1, "When I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God." The testimony he proclaimed, of course, was the salvation message.

But believers have another testimony to give, and this other testimony is especially pertinent to the Revelation 15 setting. In Luke 9, as Jesus sent the twelve out to preach the kingdom of God, He told them in verse 5, "whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them."

It is in this sense that the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony is now opened. The believers in heaven are about to bring their testimony against those who have rejected the gospel.

15:6. And the seven messengers came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

These seven believers represent all believers. They are now coming out of the temple in heaven to bring judgment to the unsaved; they have the seven plagues with them. The number seven in both cases underscores the perfection of every aspect of God's salvation plan.

That these believers are clothed in pure and white linen signifies that they are righteous before God. This is more clearly evident in Revelation 19:8. Describing the bride of Christ, that verse says, "And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints."

Believers stand perfectly righteous before God, of course, only because they have been thoroughly washed by the blood of Christ.

Why are they girded with golden girdles? Remember when we studied Revelation 1:13, we saw that Christ was also girded with a golden girdle? We learned from Isaiah 11:5 and Exodus 28:8 then that it was a picture of Christ being our eternal High Priest.

Priestly duties. By the same token, this verse is saying that these believers are coming to carry out a priestly office. As a royal priesthood, we know that our duty on this earth is to intercede on behalf of the unsaved. But what is the priestly office that we will carry out in heaven on Judgment Day?

Well, let's consider what the priest in the Old Testament did. He indeed made intercession for the Israelites. But what did he do? He offered sacrifice. He killed the lamb. He killed the oxen. He burnt the burnt offerings. Symbolically, the animals killed and burned pointed to Christ, who in turn represented the sinners for whom the priest interceded.

When the Lord Jesus Christ came as the High

Priest, He came to make intercession for us, did He not? But He also came to offer Himself as the Sacrifice. He sacrificed Himself for our sins. He went through hell fire on our behalf.

We can see, therefore, that the office of the priest is to execute judgment on sinners to satisfy God's demands that the wages of sin is death. Only priests that are appointed by God have the authority to do that. This is the reason why after Saul had offered sacrifices without authorization in I Samuel 13, he was severely punished.

Here, the believers who have the seven last plagues are coming as priests to bring judgment on the unsaved. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, they will be active in the judging process.

15:7. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven messengers seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

Earlier in Revelation, we saw that the term "four beasts" should really be translated "four living creatures", and that they are a representation of God Himself. So, here the seven messengers are being given by God Himself seven golden vials full of His wrath. As this vision unfolds, especially in Chapter 16, when the seven vials are poured upon the earth, we'll find that it is quite similar to what we saw in Revelation 8 and 9.

To better see this parallelism, let's go back and look at Revelation 8:2-5:

And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

Notice first that there was much incense in the censer. It had to do with the prayers of the saints. Back in Revelation 6:10, the souls of the believers in heaven had cried with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

Then, the censer was filled with fire and cast into the earth. We saw then that that censer represented two things: (1) the judgment upon the world, and (2) the atonement provided by Christ's sacrifice that protected believers from that judgment.

Lastly, the seven angels blew their trumpets one by one, as God poured out His wrath, starting with the corporate church and finally ending with Judgment Day itself.

Parallel sequence. Here in Revelation 15, we see that believers are given the vials filled with the wrath of God. God is effectively answering their prayers and saying to them, "The time to avenge your blood has come." This, as a matter of fact, is another reason why they are singing the song of Moses.

Earlier, when we studied verse 3, I quoted only the first four verses of the song that Moses sang in Deuteronomy 32. Well, that song ended with these verses (41-43):

If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge

the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

In the song of Moses, you see, God already promised to avenge the blood of His servants. Now, He is about to send His people to render vengeance to His enemies.

Remember, these believers will not be acting on their own behalf. It will not be a personal vendetta. They will be carrying the priestly duty that God has assigned them. They will be coming in the power of God to do the will of God, who lives for ever and ever.

15:8. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven messengers were fulfilled.

Smoke, as we have learned before (Rev. 9:2), has to do with God's judgment. So, this verse is saying that when Judgment Day comes, all of God's power and glory will be manifested. Christ will be totally victorious. All of God's justice will be satisfied.

Like the seven trumpets that began sounding in Revelation 8, the seven plagues will be poured out in Revelation 16 one after another. And again like those seven trumpets, the first six vials relate to events immediately preceding the last day, while the last vial pictures Judgment Day itself.

It says here that no one will be able to enter into the temple until the whole Judgment process is over. Here, God is referring to the new heaven and new earth that He will create after Satan and all the unsaved have been cast into eternal hell.

Of the new creation, we read in Revelation 21:22, "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." That is the glorious temple into which we, who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, will enter after Judgment Day is all over. In that Temple, we will be dwelling with God forevermore."

Revelation 16

*Lesson 25 for Revelation 16:1-14 ~ "The First Six Plagues"*²⁵

16:1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven messengers (angels), Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

In our study of Revelation 15:1, you may recall, we learned by looking ahead at Revelation 21:9 and 22:8,9 that the seven angels with the seven last plagues are actually seven believers. As the Greek word for "angel" can be just as correctly translated "messenger", I am again substituting the former with the latter in this study to avoid confusion. These messengers, who are with the Lord in heaven, are now told to pour out the vials, or bowls, of God's wrath upon the earth.

As we proceed in this chapter, you will notice a close parallel between the outpouring of the seven bowls here and the sounding of the seven trumpets back in Chapters 8-12. Indeed, you'll find that the first six bowls, like the first six trumpets, have to do with the final tribulation period; only the last one refers to Judgment Day itself.

The difference. Nevertheless, the two pictures are different in one important respect. In Revelation 8 and 9, we saw repeatedly the fraction one-third, which is a symbol God had assigned to believers in Zechariah 13:9 and to

²⁵ *New Life Digest*, First Quarter 2001 [Original Series – Revelation 16:1-14 "The First Six Plagues", *NLD*, Third Quarter 1992].

the corporate church in the context of those Revelation chapters. The sounding of the first six trumpets thus focuses on God's judgment against the corporate church that has turned apostate.

Here in Revelation 16, the term one-third does not appear anywhere at all. The bowl in this verse, for instance, is poured upon the earth. In fact, the focal point of the whole chapter is on God's terrible judgment upon the world at large.

16:2. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

Who has the mark of the beast? Anyone at all who is a slave of Satan, as God declares in Revelation 13:16. And who worship his image? All that dwell upon the earth whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life (13:8). In short, an evil and grievous sore has come upon all the unsaved people of the world.

The Bible frequently uses the figure of a grievous sore, or a grievous wound, to illustrate damnation. Take Job, for example. He was afflicted with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. In the spiritual dimension, the aggrieved Job was a type of the Lord Jesus being condemned for our sins when He came to be our Savior.

In Nahum 3, where God uses Nineveh as a picture of the unsaved world, we read in verse 19: "There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" ("Bruit" is an old English word for "report".)

God is saying there that because of their persistent wickedness, the unsaved of the world will have such a grievous wound that no healing of that wound – that is, no escape from eternal damnation in hell – will be available. Well, that's the very same message that God is declaring here in Revelation 16:2.

16:3. And the second messenger poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea.

We looked at the symbolic meaning of "the sea" in our earlier studies and saw that it referred to the wicked of the world. We read in Isaiah 57:20, for example, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

Now, as the second messenger pours out his bowl of God's judgment, the sea becomes as the blood of a dead man. This judgment is conspicuously similar to one of the ten plagues that came upon Egypt, which culminated in the killing of all the firstborn Egyptians. In fact, we'll see other similarities later on. That's because those ten plagues were also a picture of the end of the world. The first nine represented the final tribulation period; the killing of the firstborn, Judgment Day itself.

Strictly allegorical. I think I should emphasize again at this point that almost throughout the entire Book of Revelation, God uses earthly words and events parabolically to teach us spiritual truths. Verse 2, for instance, is not saying that a literal sore will come upon every human being. For that verse to harmonize with the rest of the Bible, we must understand that it is talking about a spiritual sore.

Likewise, here in verse 3, God is not saying that all the seas and oceans will turn into blood during the final tribulation period. True, in Exodus, the Nile River did literally become as blood and brought forth death. But there, God was setting up types and figures of the wrath of God.

Here, God is picturing the hopeless state at end-time of those who are not among God's elect. Because of their wickedness, as Romans 1

declares, God will give them over to their shameful lusts, their vile affections, and their reprobate minds. As their sin reaches full measure, every living soul among them dies the second death.

16:4. And the third messenger poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.

Again, blood has to do with death and damnation. The fact that Christ shed His blood to save us believers means that He endured eternal damnation for our sins.

And rivers and fountains of waters, as we learned before, normally relate to the living water of the gospel. Now, the rivers and fountains have become blood. For all practical purposes, the corporate church is no longer bringing the true gospel that is circumscribed by the Bible alone and in its entirety. Drowning the world, instead, are a wide variety of false gospels, as well as all kinds of religions and beliefs that lead only to death.

All this does not mean that no one at all will be saved during the final tribulation period. Although the institutional church has turned faithless, God remains faithful. He will preserve for Himself people and ministries that do not bow the knee to Baal to bring the salvation message to the last of His elect. The world at large, however, are kept from hearing the true gospel.

16:5. And I heard the messenger of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.

Here, we find the messenger that has just poured out the bowl upon the waters – that is, the unsaved of the world – praising the Lord for having so judged the world.

As I pointed out in an earlier study, while we are on this earth, we are to love our enemies. We want the best for them; we desire to see them saved. But once we leave our sin-cursed body to be with Christ, we have the mind of God. And so, this believer in heaven is praising God for having poured out His wrath upon the wicked.

His statement "Thou art righteous, O Lord" emphasizes the perfection of God's holiness and justice. And, of course, "which art, and wast, and shalt be" means that God is from everlasting to everlasting.

16:6. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

As God begins to judge the unsaved people of the world, He puts special emphasis on one particular sin of theirs, that they have shed the blood of saints and prophets. They have killed His people. So important is this truth that God reiterates it in Revelation 18:24. There we read, "And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

People all over the world, of course, have not been literally killing believers. In our day, in fact, very few people have actually had to shed blood for being Christians. Only a tiny percentage of true believers are martyred.

But remember, murder in the Bible is more than physical killing. Jesus says that if we hate our brother, we have already committed murder in our heart. From God's vantage point, the very act of hatred is an act of murder.

Remember also that the Lord says in Matthew 10:22, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake"? In other words, people of the world, being slaves of Satan, consciously or unconsciously hate all believers. From God's vantage point, therefore, they have shed the blood of saints and prophets.

The last phrase there says "for they are worthy." They deserve to be judged. You see, God has promised believers that He would avenge them. In Luke 11:50, 51, for instance, He says:

That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.

And telling us to live peaceably with all men while we are on this earth, Romans 12:19 reads:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

16:7. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

When the fifth seal in Revelation 6 was opened, we saw under the altar the souls of believers who had been slain. They were asking God to avenge their blood. Now, from the altar comes from them a statement of satisfaction, that God's judgments upon the unsaved are true and righteous. There are many examples of this kind of thinking in the Old Testament. We read in Psalm 137:8,9:

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

The "daughter of Babylon" there is a figure of the people in the whole kingdom of Satan. We also read in Psalm 149:5-7:

Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people.

Very vindictive language, isn't it? Again, you and I, as we exist in the world in this New Testament period, are not to read this and say, Aha! It's wonderful that God will pour out His wrath on all the unsaved. No way! Jesus says we are to love our enemies and to witness to them. But once in heaven, we'll be able to say "Amen" to these passages.

16:8. And the fourth messenger poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.

The sun is spoken of in many passages in the Old Testament. Here's Malachi 4:1-3:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.

In this context, the Lord Jesus Christ is pictured as the sun. He is called the Sun of righteousness. And while He brings healing to those who fear Him, He will also bring destruction to the whole universe when He returns.

So, the pouring out of this fourth bowl upon the sun is a figure of speech indicating that the time has come for God to begin judging the unsaved. By the grace of God, no children of His will be hurt by this scorching. God assures us in Psalm 121:5-7:

The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

And in Isaiah 49:10:

They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

16:9. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

When sin multiplies, terrible things happen on this earth. Man's inhumanity to man results in wars and killings, famine and plagues. In this connection, a prophecy that is being fulfilled in our day is Romans 1:27:

And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

Never in the history of mankind have homosexuals been so wantonly flaunting their lifestyle. Let me hasten to emphasize that homosexuality is not necessarily worse than other acts of disobedience. And like any other sinner, a homosexual can become a child of God if he cries out for mercy and is given the faith to trust in Christ. But instead of repenting, most of the people engaging in this perversion are actually proud of their behavior. As a result, more and more of them are suffering from AIDS – the “recompence of their error which was meet [suitable]”.

Intransigence. Other unsaved people have also been suffering increasingly the consequences of their persistent sin. Widespread fornication, for example, has directly led to mounting divorces and broken families.

Does mankind finally blame themselves for these problems? No. They blame God. They blaspheme the name of God. And they “repent not to give Him glory”. Instead of repenting, the unsaved of the world just go deeper and deeper into their sins in the final tribulation period, as the wrath of God abides on them more than ever.

Don't forget that we don't have to wait until Judgment Day itself before the wrath of God abides on us. God says in John 3:36:

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

16:10,11. And the fifth messenger poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

This sounds much like the last two verses. Only now, it speaks of the world in terms of the kingdom of Satan. The “seat of the beast” refers to the ruling kingship of the devil. Of the ten plagues recorded in Exodus 8-11, the second to last was one of darkness coming upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that could be so felt that nobody could move about. Well, God is using that figure here for the end-time scene.

During the final tribulation period, the Satan-dominated world is in total spiritual darkness. Result: there is the killing, the hatred, the moral decay, the drug addiction and all the other evil things that go on. All this is typified by pains and sores on the people in Satan's kingdom. So much so that they gnaw their tongues for pain. Yet, they repent not of their deeds. In their deceit and blindness, they blame the God of heaven; they blaspheme their Creator.

16:12. And the sixth messenger poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the

water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

One of the many passages in the Bible that talks about the drying up of the rivers is Isaiah 44:24-28:

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself...That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

God promised there that Christ, typified by King Cyrus of Persia, would come and provide for our salvation. The “deep” and the “rivers” are figures of eternal damnation. Even as the parting of the Jordan River enabled the Israelites to enter the promised land on dry ground, Christ dried up the curse of sin by enduring hell on our behalf, thereby laying the foundation upon which the eternal temple is built.

Because this drying up of the waters refers to salvation, this Isaiah passage doesn't relate directly to Revelation 16:12. A distinct relationship, however, can be found in Jeremiah 50, where God talks about the destruction of Chaldea, or Babylon. (Symbolically, the River Euphrates is equivalent to Babylon because it flowed right through the city of Babylon.)

God begins in verse 35, saying, “A sword is upon the Chaldeans, saith the Lord, and upon the inhabitants of Babylon, and upon her princes, and upon her wise men.” He then speaks of a sword being upon the false prophets, the mighty men, their horses and chariots, and upon all the people in their midst, and concludes in verse 40, “As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, saith the Lord; so shall no man abide there, neither shall any son of man dwell therein.”

A drought. All this is a picture of Judgment Day, when God will destroy the dominion of Satan. Within that context, we find a reference to waters being dried up in verse 38:

A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up: for it is the land of graven images, and they are mad upon their idols.

You see, because the people are crazy over their idols, God will bring a drought upon their waters. In other words, because mankind indulges heavily in idolatry of all kinds, God will so close their ears that they simply cannot hear the water of the gospel. This then is what Revelation 16:12 is talking about.

Prerequisite. All this must take place in the world “that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.” What preparation is this? Well, in Isaiah 41:1-3, we read,

Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment. Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet.

The righteous man from the east is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is described in Malachi 4:2 as “the Sun of righteousness” that arises “with healing in his wings” and the rises in the east. Here in Isaiah 41, He's coming in judgment. And Revelation 16 picks up this figure as it talks about the Euphrates being dried up so that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

The kings of the east here, though, are the believers. We are of royal blood; we are the

princes of God; and we reign and rule with Christ. On Judgment Day, we will also be judging with Him.

16:13. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

Again, remember in one of the ten plagues of Exodus 8, there were frogs everywhere in the land? What do the frogs signify? In Psalm 78:45, where God recounts that judgment against Egypt, we read, “He sent divers [that is, different] sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.” By God's definition, you see, frogs represent that which destroys.

Whereas the frogs in Exodus 8 were sent by God to destroy the Egyptians, the frogs here come out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, which are all representatives of the kingdom of Satan. We don't have to think about three individuals or three personalities. Note that the destroying forces all come out of the mouth. The devil and his emissaries will lead people to their destruction with their lies.

God's purpose. Notice also that the number three is emphasized. It assures us that the seeming victory of Satan will be in full accord with the purpose of God. We find this reassurance also in II Thessalonians 2:11,12:

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It is the purpose of God to let Satan overwhelm the world with sin toward the end of time. Why? To prepare the way for God and His saints to judge the unsaved on Judgment Day.

16:14. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

The principal way by which Satan deceives the world is the working of miracles by his slaves. Remember, these frogs come to destroy, not to edify nor to give light.

When we studied Revelation 13:14, I discussed at length this subject of miracles, especially those used by Satan's workers toward the end of time. In a nutshell, I noted then that when Christ was on earth and later when the apostles began their ministries, they did signs and wonders to attest to their authenticity. Satan was not doing any signs and wonders then. Conversely, when Satan comes at the end of time with signs and wonders, Christ and His people will not be doing them, lest they create confusion.

Among the signs most commonly used by Satan: falling over backwards, speaking in tongues, miraculous healing, and messages from dreams, visions, voices and angel visitations. The Bible warns of this in II Thessalonians 2:9,10: “Even him [the Lord Jesus], whose coming is after [or against] the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

Worldwide. Satan's deception will come not just through false gospels under the Christian umbrella, but all kinds of religions and cults that take advantage of man's refusal to love the truth. And these counterfeit miracle workers will go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world. It is a means in God's hand to prepare the world for the final confrontation between God and Satan, the final battle that will come at the great day of God Almighty. That battle is linked to Armageddon in verse 16 and we'll look at its character carefully when we

come to that verse. Suffice it for me to say now that it is not a physical battle between believers and unbelievers; it is Judgment Day itself.

Lesson 26 for Revelation 16:15-21 ~ "The Final Plague"²⁶

16:15a. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth,

God interjects a warning in this verse. It is an interjection because the verses before and after this both talk about the great battle that is to come.

To be specific, verse 14 speaks of the spirits of devils going forth unto the kings of the earth "to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." And verse 16 says, "he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." Here, in the midst of those two related verses, God warns, "Behold, I come as a thief."

The rapture. What does He mean by coming as a thief? There are those who interpret it to mean that when Christ returns, He will come sneakily, just as a thief would come to rob someone, and secretly rapture the believers.

Let me put that idea to bed very quickly. The easiest way, I think, is to look at I Thessalonians 4. Even those who teach that Christ will secretly rapture the believers will agree that this chapter is talking about the rapture. Now, read verses 16-17 carefully:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

That clearly is the rapture; we are caught up in the air to be with Christ. This language cannot be taken to mean a silent coming of the Lord Jesus. He descends from heaven with a shout, with a loud command.

Power and glory. A parallel to this passage is given in Matthew 24. There, Jesus says in verses 30 and 31:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

The Son of Man, it declares, will come with power and great glory, and they – that is, all the people on earth – will see it. There will be a great sound of a trumpet announcing the Lord's return. So, don't let anyone tell you that Christ will come quietly and secretly to rapture the believers.

What then does "I come as a thief" mean? Well, God's own explanation appears in I Thessalonians 5:2,3:

For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Complacency. Christ will not return sneakily, you see. He will come as a thief in the sense that it will be a surprise to unbelievers. Spiritually, they are complacent with their own righteousness, their own religion or their false

gospels. Physically, they think there is peace and safety in the world. But then, sudden destruction shall come upon them, and they shall not escape. When Christ returns, they will be utterly surprised.

But now notice verse 4: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." We who have become saved will not be surprised by Christ's return, because we are spiritually ready. His coming will not overtake us as a thief.

Throughout history. In a sense, Christ has been coming as a thief to unbelievers all through history. When an individual dies, saved or unsaved, his eternal destination is sealed. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). For a believer, it is merely a matter of his soul changing residency. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (II Cor. 5:8). He leaves his body and goes to live and reign with Christ in heaven.

But when an unsaved person dies, his body goes into the grave and his soul goes down to a place of silence (Psa. 115:17). He no longer has any conscious existence. The next thing he knows is the resurrection of the last day, as he finds himself standing before God answering for his sins. For him, effectively, the moment of his death is the moment Christ comes as a thief.

He that watcheth. Coming back to Revelation 16:15, we next read, "Blessed is he that watcheth." Who watches what? This idea of watching is discussed also in Matthew 24, where Jesus is talking to the disciples about the upcoming Judgment Day. To pick up the context, let's begin with verse 37:

But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

The Lord's return will surprise the world just as the flood of Noah's day surprised the unsaved of that day. Jesus then talks about the rapture in verses 40 and 41, saying,

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

The ones that are taken are raptured to be with Christ; the others are left for judgment. Now, in that context, Jesus declares in the next three verses:

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the Goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Do you see now how Jesus uses the word "watch" in that example? If you know that Judgment Day is coming and are ready for it, then you will not be surprised. The only way to be ready, of course, is to make sure that you have become saved.

16:15b. and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

Before Jesus was crucified, they took off His clothing so that He hung naked on the cross. Symbolically, it underscores that Jesus was then standing before God with all of the believers' sins that had been laden upon Him exposed.

Because the sins of believers have been fully paid for by Christ, they have been clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. And since a child of God can never lose his salvation, he always keeps his garments on. Every person

that has not trusted in Christ as his Savior, however, will walk spiritually naked before God on Judgment Day with all his shameful sins exposed.

16:16. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

In Israel, there is a mountainous area called the Mount of Megiddo. Right below that is a large plain called the plains of Megiddo. Travelers by the hundreds of thousands go to Israel every year and look at that plain. And they are told that this is where the battle of Armageddon will someday be fought. Supposedly, Russia or China will come from the north with billions of soldiers to attack Israel, but Israel will defeat them right there.

Is that really going to be the Battle of Armageddon? Absolutely not! Actually, Revelation 16:16 is the only verse in the Bible in which the word Armageddon appears. To understand what God has in view with this Battle of Armageddon, let's look again at the context. In verse 14, we read that the spirits of devils, working miracles, go forth and gather "the kings of the earth and of the whole world" to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. So, the battle involves the whole world, not just some political nations in it.

Moreover, up to this point, this chapter has presented various pictures of the final tribulation period, when Satan and his false prophets, working miracles, deceive the world with false gospels. And verse 14 in particular has talked about the activity of the spirits of devils. Looking at the context carefully, therefore, we must conclude that it is a spiritual battle, the Battle of Armageddon, that Satan and all of the unsaved will finally be destroyed.

Judgment Day. This picture is dramatically painted in Revelation 19. Verse 11 there reads:

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

Notice that God couples the idea of judging with making war here. The man that sits upon the white horse is, of course, the Lord Jesus. Jumping down to verses 19 and 20, we read:

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

We'll look at this passage in more detail when we get into Chapter 19. But notice for the time being that the war ends with the beast and the false prophet being thrown into hell. That's Judgment Day. The Battle of Armageddon, I repeat, is a figure of speech that represents the final Judgment Day.

Deborah and Barak. Why is it called the Battle of Armageddon? Because Armageddon is a Hebrew word that means "the mount, or the mountain, of Megiddo", and because God has recorded in Judges Chapter 4 a battle fought in the plains of Megiddo that typified Judgment Day. Before that battle took place, God had delivered the rebellious Israelites into the king of Canaan. That ruthless king oppressed them for twenty years. When they finally cried to the LORD for help, He responded.

God raised up Deborah, a prophetess, and Barak to save them. Deborah and Barak took 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun up to Mount Tabor, which physically rises up out of the plains of Megiddo. These 10,000 Israelites had no weapons of any kind,

²⁶ *New Life Digest*, Second Quarter 2001
[Original Series - Revelation 16:15-21 "The Last Plague", *NLD*, Fourth Quarter 1992.]

because they were slaves of the Canaanites. The wicked king, on the other hand, had 900 chariots of iron.

But with God's help, the Israelites came down from Mount Tabor and utterly defeated the Canaanites, who were headed up by General Sisera, and Sisera himself was killed. Deborah and Barak then sang a song of praise, which is recorded in Judges 5. There, we read in verses 19 and 20:

The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

Notice it speaks there of "the waters of Megiddo". It was on the plain of Megiddo that the decisive battle took place. And the kings that came and fought the stars from heaven "took no gain", they lost the war. As I said earlier, that battle is a picture of Judgment Day when believers, together with the Lord Jesus Christ, will come down from heaven to judge and vanquish the wicked. Sisera is a picture of Satan.

16:17. And the seventh messenger poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

So far in Chapter 16, six messengers have poured their bowls of wrath, bringing us right up to Judgment Day, although the battle has not yet been fought. We have gone through the final tribulation period.

And now, the seventh messenger (seven is the number of perfection) pours his bowl into the air. And we hear a great voice from heaven, saying, "It is done." What is done? The execution of God's perfect justice, the judgment of the rebellious. You see, ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God, all human beings proceeding out of them have been tainted by sin, and therefore are subject to the judgment of God.

During the course of history, God has graciously been saving all those whom He had chosen to save. As we finally come up to Judgment Day, all the elect will have received salvation, their sins having been fully paid for by Christ's death on the cross. But for God's righteousness to be vindicated and for the blood of Christ and of His followers avenged, all those remaining unsaved must be judged.

At the moment Judgment Day arrives, time comes to an end and eternity returns. That last day begins like any other 24-hour day, but it never ends; it transitions into eternity. Among the first things that happen is, of course, the rapture of the believers. They're caught up to be with Christ in heaven, as they receive at last their glorified, resurrected bodies.

That completes their salvation in one sense. (Their salvation will not be completed in every sense, however, until they experience the new heaven and the new earth because that also is a part of God's program of salvation.) At the same time, there is the judging of the unsaved. They have to be removed into hell. When all that has taken place, God's salvation program will indeed be done in every aspect.

16:18. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

"And there were voices..." What is the voice that we'll hear when Christ comes on the clouds of glory? Let's look at a few other passages that relate to this.

In I Thessalonians 4:16, we read, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel..." Remember, the term "archangel" should really be translated "arch-messenger, or chief of the messengers". It is the voice of Christ Himself, you see. John 5 also

alludes to that voice. There, we read in verse 28, "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice." It is the voice of God calling for all those in the graves to come forth.

Thunders and lightnings. When we studied Revelation 10:3, we saw in Job 37 that when God speaks, God thunders. Hence, there were thunders. There were also lightnings and a great earthquake. Doesn't this remind you of Revelation 6? When the sixth seal was opened, there was a great earthquake (v. 12). It went on to talk about the sun becoming black, the moon becoming as blood and the stars falling. All of this language is identified with Judgment Day, when the whole universe falls apart.

16:19. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

What does it mean that the great city was divided into three parts? Remember Zechariah 13, which I alluded to before?

And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God (vv. 8,9).

Symbolically, God divides the world into three parts. Two parts represent the unsaved; the third part, the elect. Now, God is separating the believers from the unbelievers. The second half of this verse is a reiteration of what we saw in Revelation 14. Verses 8-10 there reads:

Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication...If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.

Babylon, a picture of Satan's dominion, is being condemned to eternal punishment in hell. This theme about God remembering Satan's wickedness and then punishing him is often found in the Old Testament. For instance, we read in Jeremiah 51:7:

Babylon hath been a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.

Notice it says here that Babylon has made "all the earth" drunken so that "the nations" are mad. We thus know that this passage cannot be talking about Babylon's conquest of Judah in 587 BC. Rather, it is alluding to the final tribulation period, when the devil, typified by Babylon, causes the people of all nations to become increasingly sinful, as well as churches and congregations all over the world to become increasingly apostate.

God's hand. Babylon is said to have been a golden cup in God's hand because Satan is the means by which God prepares the world for Judgment Day. But we read in the next two verses:

Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own

country: for her judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies.

Babylon is suddenly judged. The phrase, "she is not healed", means that there is no hope for Satan. Why? Because his judgment is so bad that it reaches into heaven. Now verse 10:

The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.

This verse indicates that God will judge Satan only after He has saved all the elect. And verse 11 tells us how:

Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device is against Babylon, to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple.

Historically, the Medes conquered Babylon in the year 539 BC. But they are a type of the Kingdom of Christ as it destroys the dominion of Satan on Judgment Day. God has come to destroy Satan because it is the vengeance of His temple. Christ is the temple ultimately, and so it is God's justice that is accomplished.

This, then, is the Old Testament language that pictures Judgment Day. Many, many other passages of this nature appear in the prophetic books. That language is being picked up here in Revelation 16. And we will see more of this in the next two chapters.

16:20. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

We saw similar language about the islands and the mountains when we studied Revelation 6, remember? Verse 14 there reads, "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places."

We saw then that mountains and islands are used there as pictures of political kingdoms. As the universe collapses, they are moved out of their places on earth. In other words, they are being judged.

16:21. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

God often uses hail to typify judgment. We see that, for example, in Ezekiel 38:22:

And I will plead [or judge] against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

Fire and brimstone, remember, was cast down on Sodom and Gomorrah. It's also a figure of God's judgment. And here, God adds great hailstones to His list of symbols.

It says here that these hailstones weigh a talent each. According to biblical measurement, a talent is something like 130 pounds. Of course, hailstones of this size would do a lot of damage. But I think God has something more significant in view.

Candlestick and crown. In the Bible, there are two objects that weighed a talent. The first is in Exodus 25, where God describes the candlestick that is put in the temple. That candlestick, we read in verse 39, was made of "a talent of pure gold." In Revelation 1 and 2, remember, each of the seven churches was represented by a candlestick in heaven? Thus, candlestick is a picture of the body of believers.

God speaks of something else weighing a talent in II Samuel 12. We read in verses 29 and 30:

And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it. And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a

talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was set on David's head. And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance.

We see here that David took this crown weighing a talent away from the heathen king and put it on his own head. That crown represents the authority that God takes away from Satan and gives to believers.

And so, with both of these references, we can safely conclude that the stones that come out of heaven weighing a talent each are representative of believers participating actively in the judging process.

Torturous. The closing statement – “and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great” – is another figure to indicate the terrible nature of the judgment of God. It's impossible for our human minds to fully understand the meaning of spiritual damnation. Nor can we really understand the concept of eternity. But God does want to impress upon us that eternal damnation is something so horrifying and traumatic that when people finally have to face it, they instinctively blaspheme God.

Nevertheless, they must still submit to the Lordship of Christ. They must accept the sentence pronounced against them. Come Judgment Day, we read in Philippians 2:10,11, “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.”

Revelation 17

Lesson 27 for Revelation 17:1-18 ~ “The Great Harlot”

17:1. And there came one of the seven angels [messengers] which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:

When we first saw the seven angels with the seven last plagues in Revelation 15:1, you may recall, we determined by looking ahead at Revelation 22:9 that they were really believers. So again, the word “angels” in this verse would be more properly translated “messengers”.

One of them is now showing the Apostle John a new vision; a vision about the judgment of the great whore, or the great harlot. Now, in biblical language a whore, a harlot or a prostitute is someone who goes after other gospels and worships other gods and therefore commits spiritual fornication.

The many waters upon which the harlot sits, as we'll see in verse 15, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. In other words, she is a picture of the whole dominion of Satan.

17:2. With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

God created the peoples of the world in His image. They are supposed to be altogether faithful to Him. But the rulers of this world have rebelled against their Creator. They have gone their own way, seeking their own glory. They have committed spiritual fornication with this harlot.

No better than their rulers are the people of the earth. They too have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. Even as drunkards don't know what they are doing, the unsaved of the world do not realize that they have been serving

Satan.

That's why God says to believers, “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). To be filled with the Spirit is to be equipped or qualified to proclaim the Word of God. God is thus saying there, “Don't get mesmerized by Satan and become irresponsible thereby; send forth the Word of God, instead.”

17:3. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Remember in Revelation 12, we saw a woman fleeing into the wilderness, where she was fed for 1,260 days? She's a picture of the body of believers; and the wilderness, a picture of this world. You see, we are strangers and pilgrims in this world, and this world is where the great harlot is.

Notice that the beast John sees here is very similar to the one in Revelation 13:1. That verse reads: “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.” We saw then that the beast was the kingdom of Satan from the moment man fell through the end of time. The seven heads represent the perfection of his rule (it is an integral part of God's perfect program), and the ten horns picture particularly his rule during the final tribulation period.

We also saw that the name of blasphemy has to do with Satan being the antichrist. He reviles and abuses the Holy name of God in everything he does.

Spiritually speaking, “to sit” in the Bible usually means “to rule”. Not so in this case. As we'll read in verse 7, the woman is being carried by the beast. In any event, the picture of her sitting upon the beast stresses that the two are intimately identified with each other. Both of them ultimately symbolize the kingdom of Satan.

17:4. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

Satan comes, you see, looking very glamorous and very beautiful. He deceives the unsaved into believing that getting what the world has to offer is where real happiness lies. None of these things, of course, really have any lasting value.

In the Bible, as a matter of fact, purple and scarlet fabrics as well as gold and precious stones and pearls, are often identified with the temple or the body of believers. Thus, the way this woman is arrayed in also points to Satan as the antichrist. He comes with false gospels that closely resemble the true one.

The same truth is shown by the golden cup in her hand. It looks precious on the outside, but is filthy inside. Jesus uses that figure to describe the spiritual leaders of His day, saying in Matthew 23:27: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.”

17:5. And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Here, by the name written on her forehead, God is showing us the nature of the woman. The word “mystery”, as it is used in the Bible, refers to something that has been hidden in time past. Here, God reveals that Babylon is also used by Him to picture the dominion of Satan. Among other things, this teaches that in the many Old Testament passages where God prophesied against Babylon, God was talking primarily about judgment against Satan, not the nation of

Babylon.

Actually, the whole dominion of Satan is a mystery to mankind. They don't realize how real and evil it is. Had God not revealed it to us, we would be blind to Satan's deception as well. But with God having pulled off the wraps and stripped back the veil, we can now see clearly that the devil is the “Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the earth”. It is that which is corrupt, that which is in utter rebellion against God.

17:6. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

Satan and his emissaries are certainly guilty of having martyred a whole lot of believers. But in a real sense, God is saying here that the harlot is responsible for the death of every child of God. You see, Satan hates Christ. And because he hates Christ, he hates the entire body of Christ. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that anyone who merely hates someone else is guilty of murdering that person. Under that principle, Satan has drunken the blood of every saint.

The word “admiration” here means “marvel”. The Apostle John is wondering with marvel when he sees the woman. He is marveling at what he sees. We probably would marvel, too. After all, most of the people around us seem decent and moral. And the gospels they offer all sound quite attractive.

But here, God is telling us that the Satan-controlled world is absolutely evil. It is guilty of the blood of all believers.

17:7. And the messenger said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

God now promises to reveal to the Apostle John (and us) additional information regarding Satan's activities, especially those relating to the end-time period. Remember, the ten horns of the beast pertain particularly to Satan's rule during the final tribulation.

17:8a. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition:

In this statement, God is giving us a capsule of Satan's rule over the world throughout time. From the fall of man through the time of the cross, Satan ruled this earth almost totally. Very few people were saved: “The beast that thou sawest was.”

From the cross until the beginning of the final tribulation period, Satan was kept “in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day,” as verse 6 of Jude puts it. During that period, the bulk of God's elect, people from all nations, have become saved. Thus, when the Book of Revelation was written, the beast is **not** in virtual control of the world.

But he **shall** ascend out of the bottomless pit. In Chapter 9, remember, the Lord Jesus Himself opened the bottomless pit and let him loose, purposely allowing him to become even more powerful in the final tribulation period than he was before the cross. But wonderfully, the end of it all is that he **shall** go into perdition. The word “perdition” means utter ruin, total destruction, eternal damnation.

17:8b. and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

Until Judgment Day finally comes, though, the unsaved of the world will behold the harlot and wonder after her. They are titillated by the beauty of this woman. They are fascinated by the things and pleasures of this world. These are the ones whose names were not written in

²⁷ *New Life Digest*, Original Series, First Quarter 1993.

the book of life from the foundation of the world. We talked about the book of life in an earlier study, but let me review it briefly.

God speaks of the book of life from two vantage points. First, the name of every human being is written in the book of life from a **creation** vantage point. The names of the unsaved are subsequently erased from it. Thus we read in Exodus 32:33, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."

But from a **redemptive** vantage point, only the true believers are written in the book of life. God speaks of this in Ephesians 1, declaring that we are chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world. Even before time began, God had sovereignly written the names of all the elect in the Lamb's Book of Life. It is in the latter sense that the book of life is spoken of here.

17:9. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.

With the figure of the seven heads, God is showing us a specific aspect of the kingdom of Satan. Remember in Revelation 12:3, we came across a great red dragon that also had seven heads? We saw then that it was a picture of the rule of Satan throughout time. The same picture is being presented here in Revelation 17:9, as God talks about the seven heads being the seven mountains.

Many commentaries say that God has the City of Rome in view here, because Rome is seated on seven hills. Rome may or may not sit on seven hills, but the Bible certainly does not indicate anywhere that Rome will be directly involved with the events of the end of the world.

Rather, God typically uses the word "mountain" in the Bible as an allegorical expression for a kingdom. We know the word "mountains" in this verse does signify kingdoms because in the verse below, God talks about seven kings.

17:10. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

As in verse 3, the number seven here is used symbolically. It signifies that the rule of Satan is altogether in accordance with God's perfect plan. Also symbolic are the seven kings. God is not talking about seven political rulers or kingdoms on earth. Within the whole duration of Satan's rule, there have existed a great many more than seven kingdoms. Hundreds of nations have arisen. Many have fallen; some still exist today.

The last of the seven kings may be a figure of Satan's rule during the final tribulation period, because it says here, "when he cometh, he must continue a short space." When the Apostle John saw this vision (about 1,900 years ago), the greater portion of Satan's reign had already past. "Five are fallen, and one is." The seventh will be much, much shorter by comparison.

17:11. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

Here, God introduces the number eight. Why? For one thing, the number eight is the product of two times four. And as we have learned before, the numbers two and four symbolize the church and universality, respectively. By describing the beast as the eighth, God is reemphasizing that during the final tribulation period, Satan's rule over the corporate church will be worldwide in scope.

But "he is of the seven" also. Meaning: The universal rule of Satan during the end-time period is part of the overall duration of Satan's rule, and is in full accord with God's perfect plan.

Daniel 7. The number 8 here also links back to Daniel 7, which we examined in some detail when we studied Revelation 13:11. In Daniel

7:7, the coming of Satan at end-time is presented in the form of a beast having ten horns. Then, it says in verse 8, "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots."

If you pluck up three of the original ten horns, you have seven left. That makes the little horn that comes up number eight. In both Daniel 7 and Revelation 17, therefore, God identifies the rule of Satan during the final tribulation period as the eighth king. As He did in verse 8, God reassures us at the close of this verse that the final-tribulation rule of Satan, powerful though it is, will be followed by his going into perdition.

17:12. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.

There are those who try to identify these ten kings with today's Common Market in Europe. They're no different from those in the past who suggested that the antichrist was Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Nero or others. They all fail to realize that the Bible is not concerned about political or economic developments. The fact is, the language of Revelation 17 makes it quite clear that God is talking about the war that comes between Christ and Satan. And in this verse, He is again drawing our attention to the final tribulation period.

You see, when Revelation was written, the New Testament era was just beginning. The church had barely begun to send forth the Gospel into all nations. So, God made it clear that the ten kings, which represent the final rule of Satan, were still in the future. Hence, they had yet to receive their kingdoms. Moreover, when they finally receive power as kings, it would only be for "one hour". In other words, compared to the total duration of Satan's rule, which reached all the way back to the beginning, the final tribulation represents a very short period of time.

Notice that the ten horns receive power as kings "with the beast". Even as the eighth king is of the seven, the explosion of wickedness toward the end of time is ultimately identified with Satan himself.

17:13. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

Back in verse 7, the messenger of God told John that he would tell him "the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns." Since then, God has used one figure after another to point to the end-time rule of Satan. And now, he reveals the big truth that with one mind, all those who serve Satan shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

In other words, all of the sinful activities that unfold during that short period, whether in the corporate church or in the world at large, will serve to bring the power and strength to Satan. They don't know it, but all the people in the world will in one form or another be worshipping Satan.

17:14. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

Because they worship Satan, they shall make war with the Lamb. Don't forget, we are talking about a spiritual warfare here.

To be sure, Christ already vanquished Satan at the cross. But God had given Satan the right to continue his rule over the hearts of the unsaved as long as this world continued. God has been using Satan to accomplish His purposes. But once the last of God's elect has become saved, the game's over. The Lamb shall overcome Satan and his slaves. For Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords all the time. He rules over Satan and his dominion. The devil never had a

chance to win!

Victorious along with Christ are those that are called, and chosen, and faithful. Because God has called the elect, because He has chosen them in the first place, and because He has obligated Himself to save them, they are faithful to Him.

17:15. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

Notice that God uses four words to describe those on whom the harlot sits. This underscores again that the dominion of Satan encompasses the unsaved throughout the world.

17:16a. And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore,

If both the harlot and the ten horns are figures of the kingdom of Satan, can it be that Satan's kingdom shall hate Satan's kingdom? Yes, indeed.

Actually, we see this all around us. Wicked people constantly hurt other wicked people. They commit all kinds of crime against one another. Throughout history, there have been wars and fights as one people bitterly hates another. Indeed, had God the Holy Spirit not restrained sin, the world would long have destroyed itself. But God has now removed His restraining hand. So, the self-destructive tendency within the dominion of Satan is intensifying.

Jesus alluded to this in Matthew 12:25,26. When He was accused of having cast out devils by the power of Beelzebub, He declared, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" In the final tribulation period, Satan is indeed divided against himself.

17:16b. and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

Nakedness in the Bible has to do with one's sins being totally exposed before God. By causing the world to become increasingly wicked and sinful, Satan is effectively preparing this world for Judgment Day. There can be no question then that they deserve to be punished by the Holy God.

Eating flesh is, of course, a figure of cannibalism. It's another picture of self-destruction among those ruled by Satan. We can see that vividly in our day. Here's one conspicuous example: Because people have thumbed their noses at God's command against divorces and sexual immorality and perversion, there has been a mushrooming of broken families, a proliferation of AIDS, and an upsurge in abortions. That's modern-day cannibalism!

17:17. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

But God hasn't lost control. He has been guiding the unfolding affairs all the time. He let Satan out of the bottomless pit purposely. It is His will that Satan causes this world to become excessively sinful, so that when Judgment Day comes, there's no question that everyone deserves every bit of hell fire.

It is also God's purpose for both the rulers and the inhabitants of the world to consciously or subconsciously worship Satan, giving their kingdom unto the beast. The whole dominion of Satan will have a cohesiveness, an ugly wickedness that totally interrelates.

But this won't last long. It will continue only until the words of God shall be fulfilled. God has repeatedly promised to save everyone whose name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. To fulfill that promise, He has kept the wicked world going. Once that has been accomplished, Christ will come with His judgment.

17:18. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

The Bible talks about the body of believers as the city of God. Abraham looked for a heavenly city, whose founder and maker is the Lord. In Revelation 21, we read about the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming out of heaven, prepared as a bride. That is the body of believers.

Likewise, God typifies the dominion of Satan as a great city, the city of Babylon. It is the kingdom of Satan that rules over all kings and rulers of the world. And that's why we should not be surprised to see wickedness multiply geometrically as we approach the end.

Revelation 18

*Lesson 28 for Revelation 18:1-24 ~ "The Fall of Babylon"*²⁸

18:1. And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

The word "power" in the phrase "having great power" here means might or authority. From the context, therefore, we can immediately see that the word "angel" is again better translated "messenger". Angels do not rule. As ministering spirits sent forth on behalf of the believers, they do not have great authority.

The only messenger that has great power is the Lord Jesus. He comes from heaven. And "the earth was lightened with his glory" because He is the "Light of the world".

18:2. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

Back in Revelation 14:8, God had declared, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Picking up that theme, He now gives us a little more insight into the dominion of Satan, the unsaved world, if you will.

The words "hold" and "cage" are from the same Greek word that is normally translated "prison"; and the word for "foul" is normally translated "unclean". So this verse could read: "Babylon is fallen and is become the habitation of devils and the prison of every unclean spirit and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird."

We can well understand why the fallen Babylon has become the dwelling place of devils, and the prison of the spirit or soul of every unsaved person. But why is it a prison of every unclean and hateful bird? The answer, I believe, lies in the unusual Greek word God uses for "bird" here.

Vultures. That particular Greek word appears in only two other verses in the Bible, and both are in Revelation 19, where it is translated as "fowls". Verse 17: "And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains" and so on.

And verse 21: "and the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh."

In these verses, God uses the picture of vultures devouring the carcasses of the unsaved to depict Satan destroying himself, or one part of the world destroying another part. It's the same picture we saw in Revelation 17:16,17: "And the

ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled."

Hence, the fowls, or the hateful birds, is just another representation of Satan's dominion. And that's why they are imprisoned in the fallen Babylon.

18:3. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

When we studied Revelation 14, we already looked at the fornication that the kings and the nations had committed with Babylon. In their rebellion against God, they engaged in spiritual adultery with the dominion of Satan; they adored the things and pleasures of the world.

But here, God introduces a new symbol – the merchants of the earth. They have become rich through the abundance of her delicacies. Perhaps no other country can understand that statement more than our United States. Through commerce and trade, merchants have enriched themselves by trading in all kinds of delicacies and luxurious things.

18:4. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

We children of God must separate ourselves from the world, however. The Bible says in I John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

To come out of the world is a command God gives many, many times in the Bible. In Jeremiah 51:44,45, for example, where God also uses Babylon to typify the world, we read: "I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall. My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the Lord."

Even as God warns that He will destroy Satan and his dominion, He tells His people to go out of the world and thereby escape from His wrath.

18:5. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

Many people think that they can live out their life on earth doing whatever they want and seeking whatever pleasure their hearts desire and get away with it. But the fact is, God knows and remembers every sin of every unsaved person. In Matthew 12:36, Jesus warns, "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

God also says in Hebrews 4:13, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

18:6. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.

In the Old Testament God has laid down a principle that when the inheritance is divided among the children, the firstborn always received a double portion. And God typifies all believers as the firstborn. He says in Exodus 13:13, for instance, "All the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem."

As the firstborn, believers receive a double inheritance. They receive it in the sense that the blessing they get never stops. It goes on and on and on and on. But God also speaks of those that are condemned as the firstborn. We see both usages in Exodus 4:22,23: "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my

son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn."

Now, just as the double inheritance for the believers means the highest possible blessing from God, the double inheritance for the unsaved means the most grievous punishment possible. This principle is reflected in Isaiah 40:1,2: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins."

To have the iniquity of God's people pardoned, the full payment of their iniquity must first be made. That payment was made by the Lord Jesus at the cross; He endured the most terrible punishment possible. He received double for their sins.

Here in Revelation 18:6, God underscores that the punishment for Babylon will also be the worst possible.

18:7. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

Man was created to glorify God, but rebellious by nature, he glorifies only himself. He is the king of his own life. And he lives deliciously – that is, he lives luxuriously just to satisfy his own taste, his own desire, his own pleasure.

But however much Babylon glorifies and satisfies herself, God says here, that much torment and sorrow will be given to her. A direct relationship exists between the penalty to be paid and the sin that has been committed. This is in line with the principle set forth in verse 6: "Reward her even as she rewarded you."

Among the sins for which God shall punish the unsaved world is the insistence that it does not need God. This is a theme God picks up from Isaiah 47, where He is also talking about judgment on Babylon. Verses 7-9: "Thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever...Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: But these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood."

You see, Babylon had boasted, "I shall be a lady [that is, the mistress or queen of my household] for ever. I shall not become a widow. I shall not discover the loss of my children." In other words, "I don't need God; nothing bad can happen to me."

But God replied, "But you will indeed become a widow and lose your children. These two things will hit you in a moment in one day."

18:8. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

Likewise, because the world boasts that "I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow," it will be hit by plagues in one day. The plagues include death, mourning and famine. The death, of course, is eternal punishment in hell. Mourning comes because everything that this world has longed for and labored for and fought for will be gone in one day. And famine in this setting underscores that there will be no more heavenly bread and living water. The day of salvation is over.

There are those who read the next statement "and she shall be utterly burned with fire" and conclude that the unsaved will merely be annihilated on Judgment Day. Such a conclusion will not stand the test of what the rest of the Bible teaches.

God warns in other verses that "they have no rest, day nor night"; that "the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever"; that "there is weeping and

²⁸ *New Life Digest*, Original Series, Second Quarter 1993.

gnashing of teeth"; that "the worm dieth not" and so on. All these phrases emphasize that judgment is eternal, that the punishment goes on forevermore.

There can be no doubt that Judgment Day will indeed come. Why? Because God is strong. It says here, "strong is the Lord God who judgeth her."

18:9,10. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

The love for this world is so deeply ingrained in the hearts of the unsaved that even on Judgment Day, the first reaction of the kings, the great people of the world, is to lament for her. They are sad to see the things of this world going up in smoke.

But notice that they are standing afar off. Before Judgment Day, the unsaved man is right in the thick of the world. He is surrounded by all the things that the world can produce. But now, he has been separated from the world; he is terrified by its sudden destruction. He still laments for it, though.

Remember Lot's wife? She apparently loved the things that Sodom and Gomorrah had to offer. Standing afar off as she was being led out of the city, she looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. Well, all those who keep longing for the fallen Babylon will be punished for it also.

18:11-14. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all.

The Lord has warned in Matthew 6:24: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The unsaved of the world, because they do not serve God, are all serving mammon. Money is their master. In that sense, they are all merchants of the earth. And they will weep and mourn over the destruction of the world.

In the Old Testament, God gives a similar prophecy in Ezekiel 27, where God uses Tyre, a seaport much frequented by merchant ships, as a figure of this world. In the first 33 verses, God describes how the merchants from various countries profited from doing business with Tyre. Then, He says in the last three verses: "In the time when thou shalt be broken by the seas in the depths of the waters thy merchandise and all thy company in the midst of thee shall fall. All the inhabitants of the isles shall be astonished at thee, and their kings shall be sore afraid, they shall be troubled in their countenance. The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee; thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt be any more."

When Christ returns to destroy the world with all the material things in it, the kings and merchants will all stand afar in horror.

Slaves and souls. Significantly, among the "merchandise" listed in this Revelation passage that will have no more buyers are "slaves, and souls of men". The unsaved do not limit their trading to physical goods. They peddle the souls of men as well.

When we saw back in Revelation 13 that no man could buy or sell unless he had the mark of the beast, we learned that in the spiritual sense, buying and selling has to do with preaching or following other gospels. Indeed, those who come with false gospels for personal gains are effectively selling the souls of men to Satan.

Come Judgment Day, these activities, as well as the buying and selling of things, will all cease.

18:15-19. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off. And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

This passage again describes the lament of the unsaved as they see the world destroyed in one hour. But the language God uses points particularly to the apostate church.

When we looked at Ezekiel 16 in an earlier study, we saw that God clothes His chosen people with fine linen, gold and silver, precious stones and all manner of beautiful ornaments. Well, that's how this great city here is clothed. Moreover, as we've learned before, the church is often represented in the Bible by a ship or ships. And here, among the mourners are every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors.

To these false preachers and false believers, this world is their only security. And so they say also, "What city is like unto this city?" There simply is none that is like unto this world that they know about.

18:20. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

While the destruction of the world will be extremely traumatic upon the unsaved, it will nevertheless be a time of joy for the apostles and prophets. In one sense, every believer is an apostle and a prophet. Strictly speaking, an apostle is one who is sent, and a prophet is one who declares the Word of God. But when God uses these words, He generally refers to those special prophets and apostles presented in the Scriptures.

Because people didn't like to hear what they were preaching, those prophets and apostles were much hated by the world. Jeremiah, for instance, was severely persecuted. And according to the secular record, all of the apostles, with the possible exception of John, died a martyr's death.

But now retribution has come. And so God says to them, "Rejoice over her. Now that you see the wicked world finally being destroyed, rejoice." Is God teaching here that we should anticipate with glee the day when God comes to punish the wicked? No, I don't think so. While we are on this earth, we are to love our enemies as ourselves. But when we are in heaven, when we no longer have an earthly body that is tainted by sin, our mind will be the mind of Christ. And we will desire the perfect justice of God to be done.

18:21. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

This is a dramatic figure by itself. A millstone is very heavy. When it is cast into the sea, it goes

to the bottom and stays there. But there is a spiritual dimension to this statement as well. In the next verse, we're going to read, "and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee." In the context of that verse, as we'll see, the millstone has to do with the sending forth of the Word of God.

By using the phrase "a stone like a great millstone" here in verse 21, I believe God is saying that even as Christ, who is often pictured as a rock or a stone, endured hell for those who have believed on Him, Babylon must now endure hell for their sins.

That we are thinking along the right line is suggested by a very similar phrase in Jeremiah 51, where God is also talking about the destruction of Babylon. In verses 61-64, we read:

When thou comest to Babylon, and shalt see, and shalt read all these words; Then shalt thou say, O LORD, thou hast spoken against this place, to cut it off, that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate for ever. And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates: And thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her: and they shall be weary.

Notice that the Word of God is bound to the stone that is cast into the River Euphrates. Christ, of course, is the Word of God. Implication: Christ, by enduring hell for the sins of His people, has set the precedent that all sinners must suffer the wrath of God.

18:22,23a. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee.

Unlike the earlier verses in this chapter, where God talked about kings, merchants and shipmasters lamenting over the destruction of this world, this passage stresses that the day of salvation is over.

Earlier in our Revelation study, you'll remember, we saw that harpers, musicians and trumpeters frequently represent believers singing the song of salvation. Once Judgment Day comes, that song will no longer be heard in this world. All the believers will have been taken out to be with Christ. It is the end of the Gospel.

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are sometimes pictured in the Bible also as craftsmen. That's because we are the temple builders. But come Judgment Day, there will be no more craftsmen. They will all have been caught up to be with the Lord.

As we already saw, the "millstone" here is a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. The sound of the Lord is the Word of God, which shall be heard no more. Likewise, the light of the candle and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride are all representative of the Gospel. When Judgment Day comes, God's program to evangelize the world will have ended.

18:23b,24. For thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

Revelation 18 concludes with three indictments that summarize the sins for which the world of Satan is judged:

First, "For thy merchants were the great men of the earth." Man was created to glorify God. Instead, he worships and adulates those who have gained power and wealth through trade and

commerce.

Secondly, "for by thy sorceries [or witchcrafts] were all nations deceived." Being a spirit, Satan is capable of doing supernatural things. And he has used signs and wonders to deceive peoples of all nations.

Finally, "in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." Satan was a murderer right from the beginning. All through time, he and his slaves, the unsaved of the world, have persecuted and martyred followers of Christ.

But Christ won't tarry forever. Once the last of the chosen has become saved, He will return to gather His people to Himself and avenge the blood of all that Satan has slain on earth.

Revelation 19

*Lesson 29 for Revelation 19:1-21 ~ "Praise God! Satan is Judged"*²⁹

19:1. And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

This may surprise you, but Revelation 19 is the only chapter in the Bible where the word "Alleluia" or "Hallelujah" appears. We see it here in verse 1, and then again in verses 3, 4 and 6. The word is taken from the Hebrew *hallel*, which means praise, and *Jah*, which is God. These people in heaven are praising God. And the first thing they are praising God for is salvation. God has paid an enormous price for their salvation, and they rightfully give Him all the glory, honor and praise.

This brings to mind Psalm 115, where God says in verses 17 and 18, "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore." Yes, only true believers praise God and really mean it.

19:2,3. For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

They are praising God also for having righteously judged the great harlot and for avenging the blood of His servants. That her smoke rises for ever and ever underscores that her punishment in hell will go on eternally.

While we are on this earth, we do not rejoice over the prospect that God will condemn all the unsaved to eternal punishment. We are to love our enemies. We bring them the gospel in the hope that some of them will become saved.

But these people are in heaven; they are no longer part of this sinful scene down here. Their desire is to see God's justice perfectly satisfied. "The wages of sin is death," God has declared. Now that the great whore has finally been judged, therefore, they say, "Alleluia."

19:4. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

Early in Revelation, we saw that the four and twenty elders symbolize the fullness of all believers, with twelve representing Old Testament believers, and the other twelve, New Testament believers.

We also saw that the "four beasts" would be better translated "four living creatures", as they represent God Himself. These living creatures are praising God along with the four and twenty elders. We have discussed this matter of God

praising God earlier in our study, so we are not surprised to read about that here.

By "Amen; Alleluia", they are effectively saying, "Truly this is what it ought to be. So be it; Praise the Lord."

19:5. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

Coming out of the throne, this voice is God Himself commanding all the believers to praise Him.

We who have become saved are the ones who truly fear God. With our spiritual eyes opened, we realize that had God not saved us, we would have to spend eternity in hell. And having become saved, we look at Him with reverential fear, recognizing that He is the Almighty Creator, the Eternal Majesty, the Sovereign Lord, the absolutely holy and perfect God.

God is not a respecter of persons. We can be the least in this world or we can be the greatest. Yet, before God, we're all sinners saved by His grace. And so, small and great, we are all commanded to praise Him for so great a salvation.

19:6. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Responding to the command, all the believers in heaven, described here as a great multitude, say in one voice, "Alleluia." This time they praise God because He is the One who reigns over everyone and everything. The word "waters" identifies both with peoples (as it is used in the phrase "the whore that sitteth upon many waters") and with the Gospel itself (the Living Water). Hence, this is the voice of believers coming from many peoples.

When we studied Revelation 10, we saw that the seven thunders that uttered their voices were God speaking. Here, the voice of the multitude is as that of "mighty thunderings" because our desires will be entirely in accord with God's. We say exactly what God Himself would say.

19:7. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

These believers in heaven are rejoicing also because they are about to marry the Lord Jesus. Since the church is said to be the wife of Christ (Eph. 5:32), you may wonder, why then is the marriage of the Lamb yet to come? That's because our salvation is spoken of in the Bible both as something that is already completed and as something that has yet to be consummated.

For example, God says in Romans 8:15,16, "But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Having received the Spirit of adoption, we are already the children of God.

Yet, speaking of the last day, God says in verse 23 of the same chapter, "And not only they [the creation], but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." In other words, we are still waiting to be adopted.

Why this two-time event? When we were born again, we received only our resurrected souls; we continued to live in our sin-cursed bodies. Nevertheless, because we had been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee, we became a child of God. Our salvation won't be complete, however, until we have finally received our resurrected, spiritual bodies. Only then will we be a child of God in the full sense of the word.

19:8. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

To be the bride of Christ, we have to be arrayed in "fine linen, clean and white". We can be so arrayed only because Christ has put on us His robe of righteousness. This truth is spoken of in Isaiah 61:10, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

Jesus Himself alluded to this in the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22. Remember the man without the wedding garment was cast into outer darkness? He is a picture of those who are identified with a congregation or denomination, but who have never become saved.

19:9. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

God "calls" people in two different ways. First, there is the general gospel call that goes to the whole human race. It's a call that people on their own volition will not and cannot answer. Only those who are chosen and drawn by God the Father will begin to turn to Christ. The parable of the wedding feast, therefore, concludes in verse 14, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

But God also "calls" His elect individually, and no one can resist such a personal call. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me" (John 6:37). In this connection, we read in Romans 8:29,30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

It is in this sense that the apostle John is told to write, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." That Eternal God Himself would condescend to marry us humans is something difficult for us to understand; it is really beyond our finite comprehension. Knowing that, God goes out of His way to assure us, saying, "Look! I really mean it. These are the true sayings of God."

19:10. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Here, we see clearly that the messenger that has been speaking to John is not an angel; he is a fellow believer in heaven. John is not to worship him, of course, because God alone is to be worshipped.

What does it mean that he is "of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus"? For one thing, once we become saved, the Word of God becomes a part of us. Christ comes to indwell us. For another, God has given us His testimony to proclaim to others. "Ye are my witnesses." He declares, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you."

The last phrase, "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy", emphasizes that it is the Holy Spirit that qualifies us to understand the gospel and to prophesy – that is, to declare the Word of God.

19:11. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

When Christ came into Jerusalem, He came very humbly riding on two donkeys. That's because He was the suffering servant then. But here, John sees Him riding on a white horse. This is a picture of Christ coming with power in judgment.

²⁹ *New Life Digest*, Original Series, Third Quarter 1993.

In the Old Testament, God often uses horses and chariots to illustrate judgment from Him. Speaking of the eventual destruction of Tyre, which is a figure of the whole world, He says in Ezekiel 26: "By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover thee: thy walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wheels, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into thy gates, as men enter into a city wherein is made a breach. With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all thy streets: he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground" (vv. 10,11).

And in Nahum 3, where God warns of the destruction of Nineveh, another picture of Satan's kingdom, we read: "Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not. The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcases; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses: Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts" (vv. 1-4).

The white color of the horse on which Jesus rides points to the purity and sinlessness of God.

The names God uses here – Faithful and True – are meant to highlight those specific attributes of His: God is absolutely faithful in carrying out all of His commitments and promises; and His Word is altogether true and trustworthy.

With the last phrase of this verse, God again pictures Judgment Day as the final battle between Him and Satan. He links "make war" to "in righteousness he doth judge". This confirms what we saw in Revelation 16, that the battle of Armageddon is not a physical battle, but a picture of Judgment Day. Christ will "make war" by coming on the clouds of glory and bringing an end to all wickedness.

19:12. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

"His eyes were as a flame of fire" is a phrase we first came across back in Revelation 1. It is a figure of speech showing that on Judgment Day, Christ sees every evil deed and thought of those being judged.

The Lord has on His head many crowns because He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Although God uses hundreds of names in the Bible to help reveal Himself to us, we still cannot know everything about the infinite God. We know Him only in part; we see Him through a glass. And so, it says here that He has a name that no man can know. No one can really search out altogether who God is.

19:13. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

The figure of His vesture having been dipped in blood declares in effect that Christ is the One who has the unique right to be the judge. To atone for those whom He came to save, He endured the wrath of God on the cross. Now, for God's justice to be vindicated, He shall impose the same punishment upon the unsaved.

Christ is intimately identified with the Word of God, of course. The Gospel according to John opens with this statement: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God." Then it says in verse 14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

We are thus not surprised to learn here that His

name is called "The Word of God".

19:14. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

Who are these armies that follow Him? They are the believers! Among other places, this is stated in I Thessalonians 3:13, where we read, "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

Actually, it is the souls of those who have died in Christ that will come back with the Lord. They will then reunite with their resurrected bodies at the last day. These believers have all been given the robe of Christ's righteousness. And like the Lord Himself, they are also riding on white horses. Meaning: They, too, are coming to judge. Remember I Corinthians 6:2,3? It says there that the saints shall judge not only the world but the angels as well.

19:15. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

A sharp sword protruding from His mouth is another way of saying that Christ is the Word of God. With His Word, He shall smite the nations and rule them with a rod of iron.

The picture of Christ ruling with a rod of iron is taken from Psalm 2:7-9: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Just as a potter would smash all the vessels that are not worth keeping into smithereens, the peoples of the earth will on Judgment Day be reduced to a nothing, so to speak, as they are removed into hell. God uses such language as "he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" in the last part of the verse to underscore the terribleness of the wrath of God throughout eternity.

19:16. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

In the Bible, God sometimes speaks of a person and his raiment as one and the same. We have just seen, for example, that every child of God is clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. That robe represents a spiritual condition that is an integral part of the believer. That's why we see here that the name is written on the Lord's vesture.

But why on his thigh also? Remember when Jacob wrestled with the Lord at the River Jabbok in Genesis 32, the Lord smote him on the thigh and he became lame? Remember also when Eliezer was sent by Abraham to get a wife for Isaac, Eliezer put his hand under Abraham's thigh and swore that he would be faithful to carry out what he had been commanded to do?

Under the thigh of a man, of course, is the reproductive organ, and the reproductive organ of the Jewish male is that which was circumcised. All of these symbols point to the Seed that would come. Here, God is emphasizing that the promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

19:17,18. And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God. That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

An angel cannot literally stand in the sun at this point in time, because when Judgment Day

comes the sun is no more. The sun in this verse is a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. This angel is standing on the authority of Christ.

Nor are literal birds feeding on literal carcasses. Rather, this is a figure of speech God uses to show that He has utterly vanquished the enemy. We see that picture in the Old Testament many times, when God is speaking of His wrath. In Jeremiah 7:33, for example, He says, "And the carcasses of this people shall be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall fray them away."

Or again in Jeremiah 16:4: "They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; but they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth: and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine; and their carcasses shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth."

In Luke 17:34-37, the Lord Jesus also makes a reference to this: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together."

The word "eagles" there could be translated "vultures", the carrion eaters. The body is the carcass of the defeated foes. Christ is saying that when He comes as a thief in the night, the believers will be raptured, while the unsaved will be left behind for judgment.

Note in this Revelation passage that among the flesh of people is the flesh of horses. Horses, remember, have to do with strength in warfare. So, God is teaching here that whatever power the unsaved may have will be altogether useless against God. It, too, will be totally vanquished.

19:19,20. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

Again, God speaks of Judgment Day as the final battle, with Satan and his followers making war against Christ and His army. The confrontation will be short and decisive; the beast, representing the whole kingdom of Satan, is taken.

Also taken is the false prophet, that is, Satan as he comes through false preachers with signs and wonders to deceive the unsaved into worshipping him.

The lake of fire into which the beast and the false prophet are cast is a picture of hell. Elsewhere in the Bible, God pictures hell as a place of outer darkness, a place where the worm dieth not, where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth and so on.

Note that the two are cast in the lake of fire alive. They have not been annihilated; they will consciously endure eternal punishment in hell.

19:21. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

Generally, the word "remnant" in the Bible refers to the elect. We believers are the remnant out of the whole human race whom God had graciously chosen to become saved. But in this context, that word has two meanings, both of which point to the unsaved.

First, it emphasizes that no one will escape judgment. After having said that the beast, the whole dominion of Satan, has been taken, God then singles out the false prophets as those who are also cast into the lake of fire. Now, God

makes it clear that every other unsaved human being will be condemned as well.

More specifically, the remnant here refers to those who corporately belong to a church where true believers, the remnant chosen by grace, congregate. But while these people consider themselves to be children of God, they have never been born again. Come Judgment Day, therefore, they will be slain by the Word of God with the second death. With Judgment Day approaching so rapidly, it really behooves everyone to make sure that he is truly a child of God. Too much is at stake for anyone to keep playing church, instead of humbling himself before God and beseeching His mercy.

We are now entering one of the most widely misunderstood chapters in the Bible. It is in Revelation 20 that the term "a thousand years" appears six times. The difference in the understanding of that term has divided the Christian community into three major camps: the pre-millennialists, the post-millennialists and the a-millennialists. ("Millennium" is a Latin word that means a thousand.)

The pre-millennialists, by far the largest in number nowadays, are convinced that all the believers will be secretly raptured before Christ comes down to this present earth and reigns from Jerusalem. Under His physical rule, this world will experience a golden age of perfect peace and love that lasts a thousand years. It will be followed by Judgment Day and the end of the world.

The post-millennialists also believe that there will be a golden age in the future, but that the rapture and Judgment Day will come after that. During the golden age, the cause of Christ will permeate the whole world. No, the Lord will not be ruling here personally. But every segment of society will operate under Christian principles.

The a-millennialists, on the other hand, regard the term "a thousand years" as a symbol that represents the New Testament period. They do not believe that there will be any future golden age on this earth. Instead, this world will become increasingly sinful, and especially so in the final tribulation period. Immediately after that, Christ will return to rapture the believers and judge the unsaved.

Obviously, only one of these views can be biblical. To find out where truth is, let's examine this chapter carefully and make sure that our findings are in full accord with what we have learned in the first 19 chapters of Revelation.

Revelation 20

*Lesson 30 for Revelation 20:1-15 ~ "Symbolic Millennium"*³⁰

20:1-3. And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

At first glance, this passage does seem to talk about something that will take place in the future. Since Satan has been deceiving people right down to the very present day, the statement that "he should deceive the nations no more" implies that there will come a golden age when this world will not be under the impact of Satan at all.

But remember Revelation 9? It started out

almost the same as verse 1 here: "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit." That star, we learned then, was the Lord Jesus Himself. So therefore is this angel, or rather this messenger.

Now, in Revelation 9, we saw that when the Lord released Satan from the bottomless pit, it ushered in the final tribulation period. And from our study of the first 19 chapters, we have firmly established the fact that the final tribulation period will be followed immediately by Judgment Day.

Note that this passage in Revelation 20 is telling us how Satan got into the bottomless pit to begin with. So, it cannot possibly be talking about an event yet to come. Moreover, nowhere in the Bible does God teach that at some future time Satan will first be cast into hell and then be freed from it so that he can again deceive the nations. On the other hand, there are verses speaking of the binding of Satan as an historical event.

"Everlasting chains." In Jude, for example, God – warning that even as there were judgments in the past, there will surely be a future judgment – says in verse 5, "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not." That judgment on the nation of Israel occurred about 3,400 years ago.

And in verse 7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed some 4,000 years ago.

Right between these two historical judgments, God says in verse 6: "And the angels [Satan is a fallen angel] which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

Note that the Book of Jude was written just a few decades after Christ went to the cross. Yet, God already spoke of the angels being reserved in everlasting chains in the past tense.

"Cast down to hell." In II Peter 2, the Bible again cites three past judgments to warn of a future judgment. It says in verses 5 and 6: "[God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly. And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly."

Just before those two historical examples, it says in verse 4: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."

Again, even when this letter was written, God already said in the past tense that He had cast the rebellious angels down to hell in chains of darkness. Clearly, the binding of Satan was an event that took place in the past.

Binding the mighty. When, then, was Satan bound? In Matthew 12, Jesus made a statement that gives us a clue. Referring to Satan as a "strong man", He says in verse 28: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil [that is, plunder] his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house."

Christ is alluding to Isaiah 49, where God first prophesied that the day would come when Satan's house would be plundered. We read in verse 24, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" The prey and the lawful (righteous) captive there refer to the elect

of God; and the mighty, Satan.

Verse 25 goes on: "But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children." God was promising there that He would deliver or save the captives from Satan, who is called "the mighty" and "the terrible" in Isaiah 49, and "the strong man" in Matthew 12. To plunder the house of Satan of his captives, Christ had to bind the strong man first.

The cross. That binding occurred at the cross. We read in Hebrews 2:14, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Through His death on the cross, Christ destroyed the devil.

Satan was destroyed at the cross in the sense that (1) he will have to spend eternity in hell for sure, and (2) he could no longer hold people in his devilish grasp as tightly as he had throughout the Old Testament period. And to the extent that God has been saving people from virtually every nation of the world since Pentecost, Satan could deceive the nations no more.

It says in verse 3 of Revelation 20 that God set a seal upon Satan. It means that God has ordained the binding of Satan. All of God's power and authority is available to keep Satan from frustrating God's plan to save His people. The fact that Satan was bound at the cross nearly 2,000 years ago makes it clear that the term "a thousand years" in this passage cannot mean a literal period of one thousand years.

Completeness. The truth is, the number 1,000 here in Revelation 20, like almost all the other numbers in the Book of Revelation, is a figure of speech. Throughout the Bible, in fact, God frequently uses the numbers 10, 100, 1,000 symbolically to mean the completeness of God's plan in whatever is in view.

Back in Revelation 2:10, you may remember, Christ told the church in Smyrna that some of them would be cast in prison for 10 days. We saw then that the ten days represent the completeness of God's plan for the individual imprisoned believers.

Here's another example. Psalm 105:8 says, "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations." The context makes it quite clear that the "thousand generations" in the second phrase is meant to echo the term "for ever" in the first phrase.

Likewise, in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coins, God uses 100 sheep and 10 coins to symbolize the completeness of all those whom He has come to seek and save.

Now, we can better understand what God means when He says in verse 2 of Revelation 20 that the Lord bound Satan "a thousand years", and in verse 3 that He cast Satan into the bottomless pit till the "thousand years" should be fulfilled. When Christ destroyed Satan at the cross, He bound and cast Satan into the bottomless pit till the completeness of God's plan should be fulfilled. What is God's plan in this instance? To have Satan bound until the start of the final tribulation period.

20:4. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

This is one of the verses the pre-millennialists use as proof texts to support their view. Supposedly, these are the believers that Christ has secretly raptured. They are now reigning

³⁰ *New Life Digest*, Original Series, Fourth Quarter 1993.

with the Lord right here on this physical world for a thousand years.

Nevertheless, you may recall, when we studied Revelation 4:2, I took pains to show from seven different paths of Scriptures that the rapture will take place on the very Last Day of this earth's existence. What follows will not be 1,000 years, but Judgment Day itself.

Moreover, this passage is talking about the souls of them that were beheaded. It's true that in the Bible, the word "soul" sometimes means people. When it says in I Peter 3 that "eight souls were saved" from the flood of Noah's day, it means that eight people on the ark were saved. In these cases, the word "people" or "persons" can be substituted for the word "souls". Thus, eight people or eight persons were saved in Noah's ark. Such a substitution, however, would cause this verse to read, "I saw the **people**, or **persons**, of them that were beheaded." That doesn't make any sense at all.

Spirit essence. Fact is, the word "soul" is also used in the Bible to mean specifically the spirit essence, as distinguished from the body, of a person. When we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord in our spirit essence.

Only when we understand the word "souls" this way does this verse make sense. What John saw were not martyred believers in their whole personalities, but their spirit essence only. And under no circumstance will believers reign on this earth as disembodied souls.

In theory, we live and reign with Christ the moment we become saved. (I'll elaborate on this when we get down to verse 6.) But we have since been sent to this earth as Christ's ambassadors. It is when a believer dies, therefore, that his spirit leaves the body and goes to live and reign with Christ in heaven.

In a sense, every child of God that dies is beheaded by Satan. Remember the two beasts in Revelation 13, both of which were pictures of Satan? In verse 15 we read, "he had power to give life unto the image of the beast...and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." Since no true believers would worship the image of the beast, they have in this sense been killed by Satan.

Variable. Because different believers die and begin to reign with Christ in heaven at different time periods in history, to understand "a thousand years" literally would get us into all kinds of trouble.

During the First Century, for instance, thousands of Christians were killed by the Roman Emperor Nero. Does it mean that the souls of those martyrs ceased to reign with Christ in the Eleventh Century, 1,000 years later? No. The Bible teaches that these souls will live and reign with Christ all the way until the last day, when they then return with the Lord in the clouds of glory, unite with their new, spiritual bodies and judge the unsaved.

So, the soul of a believer who was martyred, say, 1,800 years before Judgment Day will live and reign with Christ in heaven for 1,800 literal years. The soul of a martyr killed two years before Judgment Day will live and reign with Christ in heaven for only two years before he comes back with Christ. Yet, symbolically, they will have all lived and reigned "a thousand years".

It says here that these are souls of them who had not worshipped the beast nor his image. In light of Revelation 13:15, which we've just looked at, this explains why they have been beheaded. And they had not received Satan's mark upon their foreheads because, having become children of God, they were no longer slaves of Satan.

Can you begin to see how these verses unfold in beautiful exactness? When we compare Scripture with Scripture and let the Bible define the meaning of the symbols God uses,

everything begins to fit.

20:5a. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.

Every day, two kinds of people die on this earth. God has just discussed the first kind in verse 4, those who died in Christ. Their souls go to live and reign with Him in heaven. Now, He talks about the rest of the dead; namely, those who die in sin.

When the unsaved die, their souls live not again until the thousand years were finished; that is, they have no conscious existence until the completion of God's plan for them. We find the same truth in Psalm 115:17, "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." The dead in the first half of that verse refers to those who are spiritually dead but are living on this earth. They praise not the Lord. Nor do any of the unsaved that are no longer living. Their souls go down into silence; they no longer have any conscious existence.

Not so with us believers, verse 18 of Psalm 115 points out: "But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore." Believers praise God not only as they lived out their life on this earth, but they continue to praise God in heaven after they have died.

20:5b,6. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

What is the word "This" in verse 5b referring to? The resurrection we have just discussed – that is, the resurrection of the unsaved on Judgment Day? It cannot be, because verse 6 says, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection."

Actually, verse 5a is merely a parenthetical statement inserted to show what happens to the souls of the unsaved when they die. The main current thought starts in verse 4, where God talks about the souls of the martyrs living and reigning in heaven. Now, God explains why they are living in heaven and shows what the first resurrection is.

According to this statement, all those who have experienced the first resurrection share the following five characteristics:

(1) **They are blessed.** In the Beatitudes Christ says Blessed are the poor in spirit; Blessed are they that mourn; Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and so on. Believers are the ones who are blessed.

(2) **They are holy.** Believers are holy. We read in Romans 11:16, "If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches." Christ, of course, is the firstfruits and the root that are holy, while the body of believers is the whole batch and we individually are the branches that share in Christ's holiness.

(3) **On them the second death has no power.** God declares in Romans 8:1-2, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

Those who have trusted in Christ are not subject to eternal damnation. The second death has no power over them.

(4) **They are priests of God.** God tells us in I Peter 2:9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation" and so on. As priests of God, we intercede for people in this world on behalf of Christ.

(5) **They reign with Christ.** We read in Ephesians 2:4-6: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly

places in Christ Jesus."

If Christ is sitting at the right hand of God reigning over all nations, then we believers who have been made to sit together in heavenly places in Him are indeed reigning with Him.

First resurrection. Since every believer shares all the above five characteristics, it becomes clear that at the moment a person becomes born again, he experiences the first resurrection.

Moreover, we have just seen in the Ephesians 2 passage above that while we were spiritually dead, God quickened us (made us alive). And He raised us together with Christ. If Christ experienced His resurrection when He was raised from the dead, then we, who have been raised with Christ from our spiritual death, must also have experienced our resurrection.

It was our first resurrection, the resurrection of our souls. The second resurrection will be the resurrection of our bodies on the last day.

20:7,8. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

At the completeness of God's plan for the binding of Satan, God will let Satan loose to usher in the final tribulation period. This is the event described in Revelation 9:1 as Christ unlocking the bottomless pit. In this context, Satan's attack upon the apostate church is pictured as a war that culminates on Judgment Day. Thus, we see here that Satan goes out to deceive the nations in the four quarters of the earth, gathering them together to battle.

All through time, of course, Satan has been attacking the church. But because God was carrying out His program to save believers from every nation, God protected the church from any lasting damage. But now that most of God's elect have become saved, God is allowing Satan to take over the corporate church. As a result, Satan and his false prophets have been able to make massive inroads into churches all over the world.

Gog and Magog. Gog and Magog are names taken from Ezekiel 38, where God also talks symbolically about the nations of the world banding together under the leadership of Satan to attack the corporate church. Here, God reveals to us that Gog and Magog are really symbols He uses to represent the nations in the four quarters of the earth.

In the Bible, God first used the expression "as the sand of the sea" to describe the huge number of offspring He promised Abraham. He said in Genesis 22:17, "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies."

But in Isaiah 10:22, that term is used to describe the unbelievers in Israel, while the true believers are identified as a remnant: "For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return." We find the same usage in Romans 9:27: "Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved."

It is with the latter meaning that "as the sand of the sea" appears here. The nations that Satan is gathering together to battle Christ not only are numerous in number, but they will be fighting from within as members of the corporate church.

20:9. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

Throughout the New Testament era, there was a church here or a denomination there that went apostate. But there were always many

congregations that remained faithful to the Word of God. From time to time, God would also raise up new churches and denominations to ensure that the work of Christ would go on.

During this final tribulation period, however, the number of churches that remain faithful will shrink rapidly. For all practical purposes, Satan's forces will have compassed, or surrounded, the camp of the saints and the beloved city – both of which are, of course, pictures of the body of believers.

But just when Satan and his false prophets appear to have succeeded in totally besieging the church, fire will come down from God and devour them. In other words, Christ will return on the clouds of glory and bring them to their knees. Every knee shall then bend and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

20:10. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

And so, the devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. It says here that already in that lake are the beast and the false prophet. Indeed, we read about the latter being cast into the lake of fire at the end of the last chapter. Does it mean that on Judgment Day the beast and the false prophet will be judged chronologically before Satan himself?

Not really. We cannot separate the beast and the false prophet from Satan, because the beast and the false prophet are representations of the activity of Satan, as he performs his devilish work in this world. The difference between Revelation 19 and 20 is that the former talks about the dominion of Satan in general, while the latter focuses on Satan himself.

At any rate, the important truth is that they shall all be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Although the sun and moon, the time keepers in the heavens, will no longer exist, God is using the expression "day and night" to emphasize the continuous nature of eternal damnation.

20:11,12. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Earlier in this chapter, God said that the rest of the dead – that is, those who had died in sin – lived not again until the thousand years were finished. We now see them having been resurrected for judgment. Judgment Day is here at last!

It doesn't matter whether they were insignificant people on earth or whether they were men of renown, they all have to stand before God for judgment. Jesus warned of this in Matthew 12:36: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

That God sits on a great white throne underscores that He is absolutely holy and righteous in His judgment.

Fled away. In Christ's presence, it says here, the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. Meaning: The security of the world is of no value on Judgment Day. All the things they owned, all the accomplishments they achieved, all the earthly wisdom they had will have no standing in the heavenly court of law. The only things that count are that which have been written in the books that are opened. First, there are the books in which all of the sins of every human being on this earth are recorded. The plural word "books" stresses the very voluminousness of the

contents.

In principle, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Cor. 5:10). But as I discussed at length when we studied Revelation 11:18, only the unsaved are being judged here.

The believers need not appear because the Lord Jesus Christ has already been judged and punished on the cross on their behalf. That's why the book of life is also opened here. The fact that their names have been written in it proves that insofar as the elect are concerned, God's justice has already been fully satisfied.

20:13. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

When a man is buried at sea, his body is eaten by sea creatures, which, in turn, are eaten by other sea creatures. Ultimately, the elements that made up that body are altogether disintegrated. But God can still resurrect that person for judgment. It says here that the sea gives up the dead in it.

The word "hell" in the second phrase is from the Greek word *hades*, which means the grave. Even if their bodies have totally decayed, the unsaved will still be standing before God as a whole personality. The same holds true for those who died in an explosion or who have been burned to ashes.

Again, as verse 12 already stated, they are judged every man according to their works. By reiterating this dire statement, God is emphasizing that for every unsaved person, judgment will surely come to pass.

20:14. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

For over 13,000 years, death and *hades* have served as the repository for those who are to be condemned to hell on the last day. The grave or the sea, or however the body was disposed of, has been the gathering place for their bodies (and the bodies of believers as well), and the place of silence has been the gathering place of their souls. Come Judgment Day, those two repositories will have lost their usefulness. And so, death and *hades* are cast into the lake of fire.

God calls this eternal damnation "the second death". The first death, of course, is the physical death experienced by all human beings, except Enoch and Elijah and those who will still be alive when Christ returns.

Whereas the first death is separation of body and soul, the second death is separation of man from God throughout eternity. God talks about this in II Thessalonians 1:7-9: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [or messengers], in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

The second death, you see, is to be cut off forever from God. We cannot possibly understand its horrible character because we are living in a world where some blessings of God are always present. Even the unsaved are blessed in many ways by His mercy and grace every day. All we know is that for one to be forever excluded from God must be super, super horrible.

20:15. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Since only those whose names are found in the book of life are spared from being judged, everyone else must be judged. And no one can be judged by God and not found guilty. And so, all of them will be cast into hell.

One may ask: "Does this mean that if my name was not written in the book of life, I must spend

eternity in hell even if I've really wanted to be saved God's way, and even if I've humbly cried out to God for His mercy, and truly trusted Christ as my Lord and Savior?"

No. That cannot be. Because the heart of man is in such rebellion against God that no one would ever want to be saved on God's terms. When anyone begins to cry out to God for mercy from his heart, when anyone begins to respond to the gospel sincerely, it's only because his name was written in the book of life.

But whether you are among God's elect or not is God's business. The question at issue is: God comes with this marvelous gospel, that whosoever believeth on the Lord Jesus Christ can be saved. He comes with the marvelous promise that if we seek Him with all our heart, we will surely find Him. And God is faithful to all of His commitments.

So the question at issue is: "Do I sincerely acknowledge that I am a sinner deserving to go to hell? Am I going to repent and cry out to God for His mercy? Do I really want to be saved on God's terms? Am I willing to hang my whole life on the Lord Jesus Christ?" I pray that your answers to all those questions are an unequivocal "Yes". God has promised in Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

Revelation 21

*Lesson 31 for Revelation 21:1-14 ~~ "The New Heaven and the New Earth"*³¹

21:1a. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away;

In II Peter 3, we are told that on Judgment Day the present universe shall melt with fervent heat and the earth and everything in it shall be burned up. God will then create a new universe out of the ashes, as it were, of the old one. Here, we find the apostle John looking at this new heaven and the new earth.

Actually, the present universe was created perfect. But when man rebelled against God, God cursed this earth as well as man, because a perfect earth cannot be ruled over by a corrupted ruler. We thus read in Romans 8:20-23: "For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him [God] who hath subjected the same in hope; Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they [the creation], but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

Note that God talks about the creation, or the universe, with the same language as He does with mankind. To get some idea of the new universe, therefore, let's look at the resurrected body of the believer.

No resemblance. We read in I Corinthians 15:35, "But some will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" The answer is in verses 36-38: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened [made alive], except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body."

It goes on in verses 42-44: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is

³¹ *New Life Digest*, Original Series, First Quarter 1994.

raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

Using the analogy of a seed buried in the ground sprouting and coming forth as a beautiful plant, God reveals that our resurrected body will bear no physical resemblance to the present one whatsoever.

Preview. Our human mind is not capable of even imagining what a spiritual, glorified body is really like. But we do know that "when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Moreover, in Matthew 16 there is at least a hint of what Christ looks like in His resurrected, eternal body in heaven. In Matthew 16:28, Jesus said to the disciples, "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." In other words, some of them there would have a chance to see Christ as He is when He comes in His kingdom.

That happened six days later, when the Lord led Peter, James and John up a high mountain "and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (17:2). This is just a beginning picture of Christ since the disciples would not have been able to look upon Him in all His glory. But it certainly suggests that our faces will also shine as the sun, and that our raiment will be white as light!

Because the present universe is absolutely compatible with our physical bodies, we can be certain that the new heavens and the new earth will also be fully compatible with our glorified, spiritual bodies.

Moreover, the new universe must also be similar to the heaven where Christ is currently reigning. Why? Because even now, there are in heaven people who are in their glorified, spiritual bodies. Among them are Enoch, Elijah and Moses. No doubt their bodies are fully compatible with the environment there.

21:1b. and there was no more sea.

It says here that there is "no more sea" in the new universe. Later on in this chapter, we'll find that there is no more sun either. The absence of sea and the sun further underscores that the new creation will be altogether different from the present one. That's because the oceans and the sun are the two most important factors in the maintenance of this planet earth. They regulate the climate of the continents, they generate the rain water for the sustenance of all kinds of life, and they perform many, many other functions that render this earth alone in the whole universe inhabitable.

But the statement "there was no more sea" also has a spiritual meaning. In the Bible, the seas are sometimes used to represent the unsaved of the world. In Revelation 17, remember, the "many waters" on which the harlot sat are "peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues". And we read in Isaiah 57:20, "The wicked are like the troubled sea." In the new universe, there will be no more unsaved people.

21:2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The Bible uses the figure of a city to picture the body of believers in many places. Speaking of the men of faith, for example, God says in Hebrews 11:15,16: "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country [the physical country] from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

What city has He prepared for them? It is the city of God, the kingdom of God made up of the whole body of believers. It is called the "new

Jerusalem" because everything in it will be new. All the remainder of the curse of sin will have been taken away.

21:3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

Again, God is using a physical entity to picture a spiritual truth. He is speaking of Himself as the tabernacle. Even when Jesus was on earth, He identified Himself as the temple. In John 2:19, He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Bible makes it clear that He was referring to His body.

So, the big point of this verse is that God Himself is with men. He shall dwell with them and be their God. True, God the Holy Spirit is present with us now. But we cannot see Him. We now live entirely by faith. But in the new universe, we will see Christ in all of His glory.

21:4a. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain:

In the Bible, God focuses particularly on a few spiritual reasons for our weeping tears:

To begin with, we weep when we discover that we are sinners. We read in Psalm 6:1,2,6, for instance: "O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears." That's why Jesus says in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are they who mourn; they shall be comforted." We mourn, we weep, we repent and we call on the name of our Savior.

Secondly, we weep as we share the gospel with the unsaved, knowing that unless they become saved, they will have to spend eternity in hell. Psalm 126:6 says, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Thankfully, as we send forth the gospel in tears, there will be those who believe. And so, we come back rejoicing.

We who live in these end-time days also weep when we see more and more churches turning apostate and coming under the judgment of God. Back in Jeremiah's day, God punished Israel by delivering it to the nation of Babylon. The prophet wrote, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (9:1)

There are, of course, many other causes for weeping in this world. There is death. There is sorrow and crying in response to broken relationships and man's inhumanity to man. And there is pain and suffering resulting from man's rebellion against God. As Psalm 119:136 puts it, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law."

But in the new heaven and the new earth, God will wipe away, or blot out, every tear. There will be no more weeping. Everything is going to be joy.

21:4b. for the former things are passed away.

The new earth is a place of perfect bliss because all the former things that were tainted by sin are passed away.

Of this same point, God says in Isaiah 65:17,18: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy."

Same person. "But what about my loved ones?" one may ask at this point. "Will I see them and remember them in glory?" Yes, we'll recognize them. The believer that goes to be

with the Lord in heaven will always be the same person that he is on this earth. We know that because when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, the latter were still recognized as Moses and Elijah. They had not lost their identities.

We must remember, however, that in heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Therefore, while we shall know and recognize our loved one, we will no longer relate to them as we do on this earth. The center of our affection will be upon the Lord Jesus Christ. But we will surely love and be loved by them, and with a more wonderful love than before – a perfect love that finds its substance in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, because the former things have passed away, we shall not remember or miss those loved ones that have never become saved. There is no sorrow in the new heaven and the new earth.

21:5. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

God reiterates that He is the Creator of the new universe and reassures us that everything that is written in the Bible is absolutely true and trustworthy.

21:6. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

What is done? God's magnificent salvation plan, of course. Declaring again that He is "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end", Christ is effectively saying that He is the Author and Finisher of that plan.

Having brought the whole program to its successful conclusion, every one of His chosen will have free access to the fountain of the water of eternal life, which is Christ Himself.

21:7. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

The moment God saves us, we are overcomers, or conquerors. And we become children of God. "And if children, then heirs;" Romans 8:17 says, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." It goes on in verse 32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Oh, the magnanimous, the magnificence and the lavishness of the gospel of grace! God gives us all things. When we think of an inheritance we generally think of money and property. But here, God highlights an aspect of this inheritance that is infinitely more wonderful: "I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

Imagine, the Eternal Majesty who will destroy the first universe and create a new one, is so condescending as to tell us that He is our God and we are His sons! We are of His family. Isn't it wonderful?

21:8. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

While believers will be infinitely blessed, the eternal destiny of all the unbelievers is condemnation. What kind of people are they?

(1) **The fearful.** No, they didn't fear God when it was still the day of salvation. But, as we saw in Revelation 6, when Christ comes on the clouds of glory, every unsaved person will be in stark terror, knowing that Judgment Day has come.

(2) **The unbelieving.** No matter how pure, how decent and how moral a person is by human standards, he is filthy in God's eyes if he had not trusted Christ as his Savior. Thus, John 3:18 warns: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned

already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

(3) **The abominable.** The prophet Daniel spoke many times of the "abomination of desolation" standing in the holy place. In those passages, he was prophesying the host of false prophets that would come toward the end of time with gospels other than that of the Bible. Thus, false prophets are the abominable.

(4) **Murderers.** The Bible says, if we hate our brother, we already have committed murder in our hearts. Without realizing it, the unsaved of the world bear an extreme hatred toward the Lord Jesus Christ and His people. Even though physically most of them have not killed anyone, they are all murderers.

(5) **Whoremongers.** This is another word for fornicators. We are created in the image of God. Anyone who does not live out his life to the glory of God is engaging in spiritual fornication.

(6) **Sorcerers.** Mankind is fascinated by the occult. But with the exception of the short time when Jesus and the apostles were on earth, the only supernatural breakthrough God wants us to be concerned with is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. All other supernatural activities are of Satan.

(7) **Idolaters.** All those who do not worship Christ, the only living God, are idol worshippers. We may worship our self, humanity, or things created by humans. We may worship "Mother Earth" or we may worship money and power. Whatever it is, it is idolatry.

(8) **All liars.** Satan is the father of lies and every unsaved person is a slave of Satan. God even speaks of them as being children of Satan. As Christ is the way and the truth, they are the antithesis of truth.

In sum, God is reiterating here that all those who have not put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will spend eternity in the lake of fire, which is the second death.

21:9,10. And there came unto me one of the seven angels [messengers] which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

What a show piece this will be! When a king marries a queen, or a prince marries a princess, there is beauty and magnificence everywhere. But weddings of earthly kings and princes cannot hold a candle to the wedding of the Lamb, who is King of kings and Lord of lords. And now, the messenger is going to show the apostle John "the bride, the Lamb's wife". But what John sees is "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." Here, God again typifies the body of believers as the new Jerusalem.

The great city is descending out of heaven from God because the body of Christ comes entirely from God in heaven. Salvation is entirely God's action. And because all the believers are now in their glorified, spiritual bodies, this Jerusalem is holy in every sense of the word.

21:11a. Having the glory of God:

In Isaiah 42:8, God declared, "I am the LORD; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." Why then does this verse describe the Lamb's wife as having the glory of God? Answer: Because Christ is so intimately united with His wife that they have become "one flesh".

Remember the biblical definition of marriage? "The man shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh" (Eph. 5:31). That's how intimate the body of believers will be with Christ in heaven.

21:11b. and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

Jesus, of course, is the Light; He is also the most Precious Stone. But here, those two features are used to describe the bride. Once again, God links us believers directly with the Lord Jesus Himself. Back in Revelation 4, the Lord Jesus was described as looking upon "like a jasper and a sardine stone". The sardine, or ruby, was the first of the twelve precious stones attached to the ephod worn by the Old Testament High Priest; and jasper, the last. It's a picture of Christ being the first and the last, from eternal past to eternity future.

Here, the new Jerusalem is likened only to the jasper. Meaning: While we, having been created, are not from eternity past, we are nevertheless Christ-like in that we will exist forever in eternity.

21:12. And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

This is not a literal wall, of course. The vision that John is seeing has to do with the Lamb's bride, the body of believers. Of the billions of people that have ever lived on this earth, the body of Christ accounts for just a small percentage. But the total number of individuals that God has saved is still a great number. This is therefore a wall great and high.

What do these twelve gates represent? Remember Jesus says that He is the door of the sheep fold? So, the gates themselves represent the Lord Jesus Christ. And the number twelve signifies the fullness of believers, who have entered the holy city through Christ.

As in most other verses in Revelation, the word "angels" here should really be translated "messengers". We cannot really tell from the context, however, whether the messengers at each of the gates represent Christ or represent the believers. What's important is the message that these messengers bring – the gospel, that is. To enter the body of Christ through the Lord Jesus, one has to hear the message. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Twelve tribes. Written on the gates, it says here, are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. The tribes of ancient Israel cannot be in view here because there were thirteen of them. Rather, as in Revelation 7, where God talked about the 144,000, He is speaking of the Israel of God. So, these twelve tribes again refer to the whole body of believers.

Each of these gates, therefore, is named with the names of the body of believers. It is another picture showing that Christ identifies intimately with every one of His elect.

21:13. On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

In the Gospel of Luke, Christ declared that people would come from the East, the North, the South and the West into the kingdom of God. That theme, which runs through the Scriptures, is being highlighted here.

But God is also highlighting the number three in this verse. It has always been the purpose of God to save people from every nation. Hence, the body of Christ comprises believers from all over the world.

21:14. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Since this wall, as we have already learned, is not a literal wall, we know at once that the twelve foundations refer to the Lord Jesus. We read in I Corinthians 3:11, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Again, the number twelve signifies fullness. It is upon Christ that the whole body of believers is constructed. Even as there were thirteen tribes

in Israel, there were really thirteen key apostles. So, we know again the term "twelve apostles of the Lamb" is used figuratively to represent the names of all believers.

Here again God is emphasizing the close and personal identification that exists between Jesus and each member of the body of Christ.

Lesson 32 for Revelation 21:15-27 ~ "The New Holy City"³²

21:15. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

In Revelation 11:1, you remember, the Apostle John was given a reed like unto a rod to measure the temple of God, the altar, and the worshippers there. We learned then that God measures the progress of His salvation program in terms of the number of people that have become saved. As soon as all of God's elect have received salvation, the program comes to an end, and Christ returns to destroy this universe.

We find the same truth in Revelation 7. God assures us there that Christ will not pour His wrath upon the world until He has first put a seal on the foreheads of all His servants.

This golden reed, I believe, is a picture of Christ Himself, as the Word of God. The Word is the standard by which the temple of God is measured.

Notice that to be measured are three things – the city, the gates, and the wall – all of which are pictures of the body of believers. And the number three signifies the purpose of God. It is His purpose that the New Jerusalem comprises the precise number of people whom He had chosen to save.

21:16. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

A furlong is roughly a ninth of a mile, and so 12,000 furlongs are equivalent to approximately 1,300 miles. We must remember, though, that God is speaking in parabolic language. He is not talking here about a physical body. We can't even contemplate a city in the shape of a cube going up that high into the air.

What God wants to convey to us with that language, I believe, is that this city is immense. The total number of people God will have saved by the last day, though it accounts for but a small fraction of all those that have ever lived on this earth, is huge. Revelation 7:9 describes them as "a great multitude, which no man could number".

In this verse, God features the number 12,000, or 12 x 1,000. The number 12 signifies the fullness of all believers, and the number 1,000 indicates their completeness. But why does He picture the city as a cube, where the length and the breadth and the height are equal? By using 12,000 three times, He emphasizes that the total number of believers in heaven will conform exactly to His eternal purpose.

21:17. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the messenger.

Notice that it doesn't say whether this wall is 144 cubits deep, or 144 cubits high, or 144 cubits long. No one can build a wall that measures just 144 cubits. God is using this seemingly incomplete statement to underscore that He is not talking about a physical wall.

Now, 144 is twelve times twelve. Besides the number 12, it also involves the number 2 because we have the number 12 twice. And the

³² *New Life Digest*, Original Series, Second Quarter 1994.

number 2 represents the church, or, more specifically in this case, the believers as they send forth the Gospel into the world. Whenever a believer shares the Gospel with others, he is assuming the role of a messenger of God.

So, this hypothetical wall that measures "an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the messenger" represents the body of believers that have carried out the Great Commission. Having done its work on earth, the whole body is now in heaven.

21:18. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

We came across the word "jasper" earlier in this chapter when it talks about the city descending from heaven. We learned then that the jasper, being the last stone on the ephod worn by the priest, points to the everlasting nature of the new holy city. Built of jasper, this wall is also everlasting.

God sometimes uses gold to picture the body of believers, as well as Christ Himself. In Zechariah 13, He speaks of those whom He saves as the third part that He refines and tests like silver and gold. The city is pure gold, it says, because in heaven we will have gotten rid of all our dross.

The last phrase would be better translated "like unto clean glass". The original Greek word *katharos* means that which is altogether cleansed. The city is likened unto clean glass, because in the new heaven and the new earth there is no spot of sin anywhere.

21:19,20. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

Remember God says in I Corinthians 3 that we build upon the foundation, which is Christ, using gold, silver and precious stones, wood, hay and stubble? The gold, silver and precious stones refer to those who have become saved after having heard the Gospel; the wood, hay and stubble that were burnt up represent those who have never become truly saved. We are gold, silver and precious stones.

In verse 18, God already likens the city, the body of believers, to gold. Here, He speaks of believers in terms of precious stones. Again, God stresses the intimate relationship that exists between Christ and the believers. Each foundation is garnished with a precious stone.

These are the same twelve stones that were put on the high priest's ephod, but they are listed in a different order. In Exodus 28:17, the first stone named is the sardius. Here, it is the sixth stone. And while the jasper was the last stone in the ephod, it is used here to garnish the first foundation, thereby underscoring the eternal nature of this kingdom.

21:21a. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl:

The word "pearl" is featured in one of the parables Christ gives in Matthew 13. Beginning with verse 45, we read: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

The man is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He was seeking goodly pearls – namely, the kingdom of God or the body of Christ. The pearl He found was of great price. To purchase that kingdom for Himself, Christ had to sell all that He had. He had to empty Himself of His glory to become a man, and go to the cross to take the punishment on behalf of all those whom He came to save.

Once again, God emphasizes the intimate identification between Christ and the kingdom of God. We saw in verse 12 that the twelve gates had the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Here, we see that every one of those gates is a pearl. As I pointed out before, Christ is the gate, of course.

21:21b. and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

Wherever we find that word "way", "street", "path" or "highway", the first place to find its spiritual meaning is to look at the Lord Jesus Christ. He declares flatly in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

That the street is pure gold is easy to understand. Christ is the King, as gold symbolizes, and He is absolutely pure. But why is He like "transparent glass"? Answer: To see the kingdom of God, we have to look through the Lord Jesus Christ.

This matter of seeing is emphasized in John 3. Talking to Nicodemus, Jesus says in verse 3, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." To be born again means to become saved. We have to trust the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. So, this street that is described as transparent glass represents Christ through whom we obtain our salvation.

21:22. And I saw no temple in it; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

The idea that Christ is the temple is not new, of course. Jesus set that forth when He told the Pharisees, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it." Here, God is using the same figure: throughout eternity the temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. The figure of the Lamb emphasizes Christ's sacrifice at the cross, and God and Christ are one.

Here again, we see the close interrelationship between Christ and the body of believers. Earlier in our studies we saw that the body of believers is the temple of God.

21:23. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Unlike the figures of speech that we have seen in most of what we've read in Revelation 21, the sun and the moon in this verse must be understood literally. That's because whenever God uses the word "sun" to illustrate something spiritual, Christ is always in view. He is, for example, "the sun of righteousness, rising with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2); and He is the Sun "which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber" (Psa. 19:5).

So, when it says that the city has no need of the sun here, we know immediately that the sun is not a picture of God. Believers are always in need of Christ. In Him we live and move and have our being now and forevermore. In this verse, God is highlighting the difference between the new creation and the present earth. Man, being rebellious as he is, does not by nature recognize God. But he does realize that if the sun would disappear, all lives on this earth would die in no time at all.

By way of contrast, the new universe will have no need for the sun. Our dependence is altogether upon the Lord Jesus Christ, because it says here, "for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Isaiah 60. What we're reading here in Revelation 21 is quite similar to what God says in Isaiah 60. To be sure, in Isaiah 60 God was talking primarily about His program to evangelize the world, the program that began with Christ's first coming. For example, we read in Isaiah 60:9: "Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of

Israel, because he hath glorified thee." Or verse 3: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

Regarding the sun, however, verse 19 says: "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."

That's essentially what this Revelation verse is saying. Isaiah 60:19 is anticipating the completion of our salvation.

21:24. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.

Again, we find a parallel in Isaiah 60. It says in verses 3-5: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee [Christ]: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee."

The word "sea", remember, is a figure of the people of the world, who are under the wrath of God. But out of that sea comes the remnant chosen by grace. In an abundant fashion they are converted unto Christ and come into the body of believers. The nations will walk in the light of Christ, the light that has provided them that salvation.

Back in Revelation 4, remember, we saw the four and twenty elders casting their crowns before God. He is their glory. He is our glory, and we come in and pay homage to Him.

Queen of Sheba. God paints a similar picture in I Kings 10, where the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon. You perhaps are intrigued by that particular historical event. Solomon in that context is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the Queen of Sheba, the nations of the world that become saved. We read in verses 2-6: "And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions [that is, the answers to all her questions]: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the LORD; there was no more spirit in her. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom."

You see, she came with all of her glory and she brought it into the kingdom of Solomon. But when she compared her glory with that of Solomon's, it says, there was no more spirit in her. She realized that she was nothing compared with what Solomon was. And so we read in verse 10: "And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon."

Now, you see, she is a picture of the nations of the world bringing their homage to the Lord Jesus Christ. Before we were saved, we were wood, hay and stubble, using the language of I Corinthians 3; we were subject to eternal damnation. But now in Christ we have become glorious gold, silver and precious stones. Knowing that we don't deserve any of it on our own, we bring our glory back to Him.

Eternal truth. Like Isaiah 60, this I Kings 10

passage has to do with the New Testament period, when people from all nations are drawn to the kingdom of God. But here in Revelation 21, God is talking about the new heaven and the new earth. Why is He using figures relating to things pertaining to the church? I believe it's because these are such important truths that God wants us to remember them throughout eternity.

I don't know how all of this will work out. But I do know that in these visions of glory that John has recorded for us, God has featured the Lamb that was slain. Somehow, the essence of our praise to God throughout eternity will identify with Christ being our Savior and with the church having successfully carried out the Great Commission.

21:25,26. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.

The gates also signify something that begins on this earth. In Isaiah 60, we read in verses 11 and 12: "Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces [or the wealth] of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted."

Remember, Isaiah was written at a time when very few people had become saved. God was promising there that the time would come when the gates would be opened so that people could come in day and night. The gates, which represent the Lord Jesus Christ, will remain open continually.

No one need ever say, "Oh, I'm too great a sinner. I cannot be saved." The gate is wide open. We just have to acknowledge our sins and cry out to God for mercy. No one can say, "Oh, I rejected Christ so many times, it is too late for me to become saved." Nonsense! The Bible says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

No night. Notice it says here in Revelation 21:25, "the gates...shall not be shut at all by day." It doesn't say day or night. It adds instead, "for there shall be no night there." This difference between Revelation 21 and Isaiah 60 is highly significant. It underscores that never again will there ever be the threat of sin coming into the new world.

A legitimate question sometimes arises in our minds: "God created this earth perfect. It was very good. Adam and Eve were in total fellowship with the Lord. Yet, somehow sin got into this world. Is there any possibility that sin will enter the new heaven and the new earth as well?" And the answer is, "Absolutely not!" Why? Because there shall be no night there. It is the night time of sin, the night time of the dominion of darkness that has brought sin into this world.

21:27a. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither he that worketh abomination, or maketh a lie,

This, of course, is saying the same thing that we saw in verse 25, where God said there is no night there. Night time, spiritually speaking, has to do with that which is under the power of Satan, that which is in rebellion against God. No sin or sinner can come in to the new heaven and the new earth.

The statement also means that none of those who have been sent to hell can ever enter the New Jerusalem. There is no parole; there is no cross-over. We have to make sure that we are saved while we are still on this earth.

This reminder is also stressed in Isaiah 60. Verse 12 there says, "For the nation and kingdom

that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." Those who will not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who will not humble themselves and cry out to God for His mercy are going to come under the wrath of God. They will be eternally condemned.

21:27b. but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

From other passages we learned that our name is written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundations of the earth. Some of you may ask: Does that mean that, if my name is not there, I will be denied entrance into the holy city, the New Jerusalem, no matter how much I want to? Yes, that's what the Bible teaches.

But let me tell you something. If your name is not written in the Lamb's book of life, you will never have any desire in your heart to go to heaven on God's terms. Romans 3 says that no one seeketh after God, no, not one. The only reason anybody really wants to be saved on God's terms is that his name is written in the Lamb's book of life.

The problem is, many, many people want to be saved – but they want it with their own kind of a salvation plan. They consider the salvation plan that God sets forth to be reprehensible. It robs man of his self respect. It robs him of his ego. But the Bible makes it clear that we must come to God with a broken and a contrite heart. We have to admit our spiritual bankruptcy. We have to stand before Him in fear and trembling as we recognize the awfulness of hell. In childlike faith, we then ask God for the faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, I hope that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life. If you are not saved, cry out to Him now while today is still the day of salvation. But time is rapidly running out. Indications are that Christ will come back to judge the unsaved in a matter of months. Beloved, humble yourself and ask God for His mercy right away.

Revelation 22

*Lesson 33 for Revelation 22:1-21 ~ "Glory Forever"*³³

22:1. And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

This river of water of life symbolizes, of course, the gospel as it is applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of people that are being saved. The Apostle John is thus being shown a picture of the gospel being sent forth. Implication: although there is no longer any need of salvation in the new heaven and the new earth, we will be praising God throughout eternity for having provided salvation for us.

Notice that this is a pure river of water of life. The gospel is pure and holy.

22:2. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The vision John sees continues to highlight God's salvation program. Like the street we saw in Chapter 21, this street, as well as the tree of life, represents Christ.

The term "twelve manner of fruits" points to the fullness of the gospel that the Lord provides. That the tree of life "yielded her fruit every month" is again a figure of speech since there's no sun or moon in the New Jerusalem; it emphasizes that God has fulfilled the promise He made in

Ezekiel 47:12: "And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine."

Normally, the Bible stresses more the importance of a tree bearing fruit than having leaves. Not so with the tree of life, which is Christ Himself. Even its leaves bring healing to the sin-sick souls of the elect in all nations.

22:3. 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:

Back in Deuteronomy 28, God warns, beginning in verse 15, "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land..." And He goes on and on pronouncing curse after curse.

Since no one can obey God perfectly, all humans – except those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ – are thus under the curse of God. But in the new heaven and the new earth, there will never again be any curse. Instead, in it will always be the throne of God and of the Lamb.

Because He bought us with His precious blood, He is our Master, He is our Lord. So, throughout eternity we will be serving Christ. And, oh, what a glorious service, what a privilege this will be!

22:4. And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

Remember Jesus says in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). From God's vantage point, we believers are pure in heart. Because we have been covered by the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness, we shall see His face.

Just stop and think about it! Here is Eternal God, the Creator of the universe, King of kings and Lord of lords, and here we are where we can see His face. We are in His glorious presence. What is it like? We can't really imagine what it will be like. All we know is that it's going to be super glorious.

When we studied Revelation 14:1, we discussed the meaning of having the Father's Name written on the foreheads of believers. Here, it talks about the Lamb's Name. There's no difference between the two because, as Jesus says in John 10:30, "I and my Father are one."

Christ-like. That God puts "they shall see his face" and "his name shall be in their foreheads" in the same statement is significant. In I John 3:2, God says: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." When we read that, we think of our outward appearance – that is, we'll look like Christ. That may be so. But I think it also teaches that all of His attributes will be found in perfection within us.

Oh, we are not from everlasting; we are not infinite in character. But once we receive our glorified spiritual bodies, we will be like Christ. That is, whatever attributes that God has that He had given to believers in an incomplete fashion now will be in perfection, because we will be with Him face to face and we will have His name on our forehead.

22:5. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

The first part of this verse reiterates the truth given in verses 23 and 25 of the last chapter:

³³ *New Life Digest*, Original Series, Third Quarter 1994.

"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof....And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there."

What do believers reign over for ever and ever? I do not know. In a parable in Luke 19, Jesus speaks of a good and faithful servant being given authority over ten cities, and another five cities. But that doesn't really give us enough clue to find out what we will reign over. We simply leave that in God's hand.

All we know is that we will be reigning with Christ. We will no longer be under the heel of sin, under the damnation of God as slaves that have to be cast out into eternal damnation. We are reigning with Christ. We are the victors. We are more than conquerors.

22:6a. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true:

Why would God put that in here right at this point? For the same reason, I believe, He says in Revelation 19:11 that Christ is called Faithful and True when He speaks of the Lord coming on a white horse. The salvation plan that God has for us is so marvelously gracious, so fantastically merciful, so tremendously loving that it is beyond our comprehension! So, God goes out of His way to assure us that these things, which are said by Him who is Faithful and True, are absolutely dependable.

Back in the Old Testament time, God repeatedly said that someday the Messiah would come and usher in an era of great joy. But when believers of those days looked at the terrible condition of Israel, when they saw the apostasy that was in the land, and when they were taken in captivity by Assyria or Babylon, they would wonder, "Will the Messiah ever come?"

Year followed year, decade followed decade and century followed century, there was no Messiah. But then, in the most inconspicuous way, a baby is born in Bethlehem. Very quietly Jesus grows up in Nazareth. Then He begins to preach and with a handful of apostles He begins to share the gospel. Finally, He goes to the cross. All very inconspicuous. But God is faithful and true! He has fulfilled every one of His Old Testament promises.

Likewise, when God talks about no more curse and darkness in the new heaven and the new earth, about believers seeing His face and reigning for ever and ever, His sayings are faithful and true. All of these things will happen.

22:6b. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.

Again, the word "angel" should have been translated "messenger" because it refers to Christ. He is the messenger of the covenant who is showing us the things that must shortly be done. By the last phrase here, God is assuring us that Judgment Day and the new heaven and the new earth are not way out there in the dim future. Nowadays, most people think that the world will just go on and on. They scoff at the idea that Christ will soon return to destroy this universe and create a new one. This, of course, is exactly what II Peter 3 says would happen.

But the Bible has made it crystal clear that once the Holy Spirit was poured out – and that was nearly 2,000 years ago – we were entering the end of the ages. We are living in the last days. And once the Gospel is preached to all nations, the end will surely come.

22:7a. Behold, I come quickly:

In this very last chapter of the Bible, the Lord says "I come quickly" three times. He says it here and then repeats it in verses 12 and 20. Earlier, in fact, He has made this promise three other times: in Revelation 2:5, 2:16 and 3:11. Again and again and again, God keeps

underscoring that He is coming quickly.

"But this was written almost 2,000 years ago," you may say. "To the believers that have lived in all the interim centuries, Christ hasn't come quickly. How, then, can we take this promise seriously or literally?" Anticipating such a question, the Bible explains in II Peter 3:8, "...one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

The very fact that the New Testament era has lasted nearly 2,000 years means all the more that we have come very, very close to the end of this earth's existence. Let me explain:

One problem of our day is that we have been brainwashed into believing that this earth is billions and billions of years old. Against that backdrop, the idea that Christ will soon return and destroy the universe appears ludicrous.

Short history. The truth is, God created the earth only about 13,000 years ago. Moreover, other than the accounts of the Creation and man's fall, the Bible talks about the earth's first 6,000 years in just a chapter or two. Then came the flood of Noah's day. And God, as it were, began all over again only about 7,000 years ago.

After the flood, God jumps 2,000 years and records for us in Genesis 10 and 11 the division of the continents in Peleg's day and the scattering of the people over all the earth, confusing their language at the same time. These were major events in God's dealing with mankind. It was only around that time, or roughly 5,000 years ago, that writing was invented and history began to be recorded.

About a thousand years after that God called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees into the land of Canaan. Later, He changed the name of Abraham's grandson Jacob to Israel, who became the progenitor of the nation of Israel. God dealt with Israel for about 2,000 years and then Christ came and ushered in the New Testament era, the period in which God evangelizes the world.

The end. Of the New Testament era, God says in I Peter 4:7, "The end of all things is at hand"; and in I Corinthians 10:11: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." In other words, once we entered the New Testament age, we have been living in the final segment of God's salvation program. And so, we can begin to look at the end of the world.

Note that it was about 2,000 years after the flood that God confused the tongues and scattered people all over the earth. It was 1,000 years later that God called Abraham to be the father of all believers. And it was exactly 2,000 years after Jacob's birth that God sent Christ to earth. Now, with another 2,000 years having since passed, we can reasonably expect God to bring "the end of all things" to its conclusion very soon.

22:7b. Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

To prophesy is to declare the Word of God. So, "the prophecy of this book" means the declaration of the Word of God that is found in this book. What does "this book" refer to? Just the Book of Revelation? No, it cannot be. This verse talks about he that keeps the sayings of the prophecy of this book. To keep the sayings means to uphold and obey them.

As we have learned from our verse-by-verse exposition, one can never understand, let alone uphold and obey, that which is written in Revelation without going into the rest of the Bible. We must compare Scripture with Scripture. So, we can keep "the sayings of the prophecy of this book" only by keeping the sayings of the whole Bible. In short, "this book" refers to the entire Bible.

22:8,9. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

This verse emphasizes that we are never to worship a fellow human being, no matter how great a preacher or teacher he may be. It is God whom we worship. The messenger who has been showing these things to the Apostle John is a fellow believer. We know that to be so because he says he is of them which keep the sayings of this book. Even while we are on this earth, there is within us believers a sincere desire to do the will of God, although our human nature keeps us from obeying perfectly.

In heaven, however, there is perfect obedience, a perfect keeping of the Word of God. We will never find ourselves remorseful for having done or said something that displeases God. That's why we long for the new heaven and the new earth, where there will no longer be any rebellion within us.

22:10. And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

When the prophet Daniel received messages from God regarding the end of time, messages that he had trouble understanding, God would say to him, "Seal up these things."

For example, God said in Daniel 8:26: "And the vision of the evening and the morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days." That is, what you saw in the vision will surely come to pass. But seal it up for now, because it won't happen until a long, long time from now. Until then, it is not to be understood.

Likewise, we read in Daniel 12:4, "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Or again in verse 9, "And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

God was saying to Daniel, "Seal it up. It's still way in the future. Don't try to figure it out, because I am not going to open it up to anyone any time soon." That was about 500 years before Christ.

Even toward the end of the First Century, when the Apostle John heard the "seven thunders uttered their voices" in Revelation 10, he was told in verse 4, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not." At that point in time, there still were certain things that God did not want to reveal to anyone.

Time to open up. But here in Revelation 22:10, God says, "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book." It doesn't mean that God had begun to open up the passages relating to the end of the world when Apostle John was writing this chapter some 1,900 years ago. That's because in the same statement, God continues, "for the time is at hand."

What time is at hand? The time for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the time for God's salvation plan to be culminated. That's the time when God begins to open up the Word of God regarding the end of the world to childlike, studious students of the Bible.

22:11. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

This statement divides the whole mankind into two classes. The unjust and the filthy are the unsaved. They will remain unjust throughout eternity. The righteous and the holy are those whom God has saved. Their salvation is for eternity.

22:12. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

As I discussed at length when we studied Revelation 11:18, Christ does not bring special rewards to those believers who have worked extra hard for Him. We are all unworthy servants merely doing what we are called to do. But by God's grace, we will receive an eternal, spiritual body and inherit the new heaven and the new earth.

Who then receives these rewards that are in accordance with every man's work? The unsaved. The Bible says, "the wages of sin is death." There are wages that must be paid. The recompense that is given according to every man's work is the judgment every unsaved person will receive – eternal damnation in hell.

22:13. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Why is this reiterated here? In other passages God stresses that He is the Creator of the world, He is the One who developed and has carried out a marvelous salvation plan. But now, His salvation program is reaching its climax. He is about to bring it to its glorious conclusion. And even as He is the author of our faith, He is the finisher as well.

22:14. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

At first glance, this verse seems to suggest that our good works are that which qualify us to enter heaven. But we know that is contrary to what the rest of the Bible teaches.

Actually, the doing of the commandments of God is a result of our salvation. If God had not saved us, if God had not given us the intense desire to do His will, none of us will do His commandments. So, the verse is merely saying that only those whom God has saved will be in heaven.

22:15. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

God often uses dogs to picture unbelievers, especially false prophets. We read, for instance, in Psalm 22:16, "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet"; and in Isaiah 56:10,11, "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter." In other words, "Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites."

The phrase "whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" also applies to anyone who is unsaved. As Satan is the father of lies, anyone who "maketh a lie" is a servant of Satan.

In essence, these two verses are declaring that there's no commingling between believers and unbelievers. Those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus are within Christ's kingdom. Outside are all the unsaved. They are "without" under eternal damnation in hell.

22:16. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

Again, the word "angel" here should have been translated "messenger" as Christ is the messenger in the first instance. Once He went back to heaven, however, He assigned the task of sending the gospel to the world through the body of believers. We become the messengers of God. As we learned when we studied

Revelation 5:5, Christ is the root of David because He is the Messiah God had promised in Isaiah 11 that would come.

Christ calls Himself "the bright and morning star" because (1) He is the star promised in Numbers 24:17, where we read, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel"; and (2) the morning star is the first star that rises when the night is over.

22:17. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

This statement focuses on the task of the church, as well as the Holy Spirit, throughout the New Testament period. As we send forth the gospel, we tell people that while they are sinners under the wrath of God, they can escape eternal damnation by trusting the Lord Jesus as their Savior. If they truly thirst for righteousness, they can freely drink the living water of the gospel.

The Holy Spirit is emphasized here because no one will respond to the invitation unless the Holy Spirit applies the Word of God to his heart. The bride is also mentioned because it is the body of believers that God has commissioned to send forth the Gospel into the world.

22:18. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

Here we have a statement that is particularly pertinent in these end-time days, because false gospels are arising all over the world. How can we determine which is the true gospel?

In I John 4:2,3, God says, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." Looking at this statement, many conclude that anyone at all who admits that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and came in the flesh is a child of God; he has responded positively to the gospel. But we find in Luke 4:41 that even devils said to Jesus, "Thou art Christ the Son of God." Is the Bible contradicting itself? Not at all.

For one to confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh not only means that he acknowledges that fact intellectually, but that he agrees with all that Christ has declared, and that he is of one mind to serve Him. No way were those devils in Luke 4 of that mind. They were in rebellion against God. They did not confess.

Likewise, many unsaved people acknowledge that Christ is the Word who became flesh. But they do not have any desire to be of the same mind with Christ. By itself, therefore, I John 4:3 is not enough a guideline to help us decide if we have the true gospel.

Key criteria. But in Revelation 22:18 and 19, God has given us a further criterion by which we can know whether a gospel is that of the Bible or not.

For over 1,600 years, God used human beings to record in the Bible exactly what He wanted to reveal to mankind. Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. God revealed truths to them through a variety of supernatural means. But now, the Bible is completed. There will be no more messages from Him. So, God declares in these verses that the true gospel is circumscribed by the Bible alone and in its entirety.

If any man adds something to the Bible as His divine authority, God warns, "I shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book." The plagues that were written are the judgments of God against the unsaved. If a person considers divine any information he has received supernaturally, therefore, then we know he is not a child of God.

Spurious argument. Some fall into the snare in thinking, "Well, if God shows me through a vision something that is already in the Bible, then it really is not an additional revelation. And I have not added to the Word of God."

Let's see if that's a valid argument. Let's look at Psalm 18. It's a long psalm; it has 50 verses in it. Yet in II Samuel 22, we find exactly the same 50 verses, word for word. One is a complete duplicate of the other. Since it is a duplicate, can we just take Psalm 18 and cut it out of the Bible? Right at this moment you say, "Oh, no. You can't do that. Psalm 18 was spoken by God at one time, and II Samuel 22 was spoken at another time. God has placed them in two different places in the Bible. They together are the Word of God."

In fact, we find that when God duplicates messages, He is emphasizing, "This is surely going to come to pass." God has a real purpose when He duplicates statements in the Bible. Can you begin to see that if you received a message from God and it was an exact duplicate of something in the Bible, that would be an addition to the Word of God?

22:19. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

On the other hand, if any man takes any part from the Bible, God warns that He shall exclude that person from the holy city. Since a child of God cannot lose his salvation, the implication here is that he was never saved to begin with.

I worry when I hear of churches that say, "All we teach is the New Testament. The Old Testament was for the Jews." Effectively, they're denying the authority of the Word of God in their lives. The Bible says in II Timothy 3:16 that: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." All Scripture includes both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Oh, dearly beloved, let's get this very clear in our minds. The Bible alone and in its entirety is the divine Word.

Incidentally, we can be very grateful for that. Wouldn't it be dreadful, if during the last 2,000 years, God had kept on giving revelation as He did through the apostles? To search out all of those revelations, to verify them, and to compile and study them would be an endless job. And we would never know whether we really had the whole revelation. It would make a shambles of the Word of God.

But the fact is, when God has given us His Word, He has completed the Word and this is the only place we have to go to.

22:20,21. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

God emphasizes again that He comes quickly. Notice the response: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." That is the desire of the believer, that He will come into our lives, that He will come to finish His salvation program, that He will come to complete all that He has prophesied and promised in His Word. "Amen; so be it" is what that really means.

Notice also the last sentence, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Isn't it beautiful that God assures us here that we might know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? And what is the grace of God? That we might be saved! As we complete this study, may that be my plea to you. Oh, that you might know the grace of God!

Then we have the closing statement, "Amen." "So be it. So be it." That is the desire that we are left with as we finish this Word of God.

Background Information

Family Radio

The following information was copied from the Family Radio Web site:

The Ministry of Family Radio

Family Radio is committed to the Person and salvation work of Jesus Christ as revealed in God's divine Word, the Bible. We are a nonprofit, nondenominational, educational organization dedicated to obeying our Lord's command to preach the Gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Family Radio programs include no commercial advertisements. Air time for other Christian broadcasters on Family Radio is free of charge. The ministry relies solely upon God working through listeners for the financial support of day-to-day operations. We as a ministry desire to be entirely faithful to God's divine, infallible Word, the Bible. Every effort is made to accurately present the Gospel of the Bible. In purpose and belief, we stand out from other radio and TV ministries in our faithful reliance on the Bible as the ONLY infallible authority.

First Broadcast in 1959

Family Radio was organized in 1958 under our official name, Family Stations, Inc., and began to broadcast February 4, 1959, over KEAR FM in San Francisco. Since then, God has enabled the ministry to purchase a number of powerful AM and FM stations and several smaller educational facilities and translators around the country. Our domestic broadcasts reach metropolitan areas such as Birmingham, Charleston, Chicago, Cleveland, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Omaha, Philadelphia, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.

International Broadcasts

An important addition came in 1973 with the purchase of an international short-wave station, which we called WYFR, in Scituate, Massachusetts. With the use of many transmitters and antennas, the Gospel is proclaimed in ten languages from thy WYFR facility, now located in Okeechobee, Florida. In 1982, our international outreach was expanded to India and the Far East with the use of powerful transmitters in Taiwan. Family Radio has become a worldwide ministry; our broadcasts now span the globe so "That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else" (1 Kings 8:60).

A Diversified Outreach

In addition to the broadcasts, Family Radio offers Bible-based pamphlets and tracts to teach and exhort and other diverse means of spreading the Gospel, including the following.

Family Radio School of the Bible

Primarily a correspondence school, Family Radio School of the Bible courses are designed to help laymen and professionals to minister in the church, on the job, and at home through the study of various subjects and certificate and degree programs. The school operates on the principle of Matthew 10:8, "freely ye have received, freely give." In accordance with this principle, the FRSB does not charge tuition; it is dependent upon the generosity of students and friends.

Missionary Tours

Family Radio sponsors "Missionary Tours" which provide opportunities for staff members and listeners (at their own expense) to help spread the Gospel through tract distribution. Our ambassadors for Christ have visited cities in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia (every continent except Antarctica).

On the Internet

Our Christ-centered programs are now available worldwide, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on the Internet. Access to the Internet may be via computer or television (with the proper equipment). In addition to the programs on the Internet, Bible studies such as "The Glorious Garden of Eden" and "The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9" are on our Home Page. Downloadable books include "What God Hath Joined Together" and "God's Magnificent Salvation Plan." The Internet also has our program guide, short-wave schedule, and The Bible. Tell your friends and family that they can find Family Radio on the Internet at: <http://www.familyradio.com>

Supporting Family Radio

If you believe God would have you financially support Family Radio you can send your tax-deductible gift to:

Family Radio

Oakland, CA 94621 USA

Or use our "Secure Internet Check Form!"

End of Web site information.

For biblically based answers to your questions, you can listen to the *Open Forum* on Family Radio stations in many locations in the USA on Monday through Friday evenings at 8:30-10:00 p.m. Eastern Time (5:30-7:00 p.m. Pacific Time) or call 800-322-5385 (from within the USA and Canada) during the program to ask a question or make a comment. You can also listen to live broadcasts on Family Radio's Web site at <http://www.familyradio.com/> during those hours. There are also recordings of past programs available on this Web site.

The Open Forum is translated from English into nine other languages and broadcast by short-wave radio around the world. You can also listen to prerecorded short-wave broadcasts on the Web site. Write to Family Radio at the above address to obtain a short-wave broadcasting schedule for your area or call these numbers:

Toll Free: 800-543-1495 (from within the USA and Canada)

Toll Call: 501-568-6200 (from outside the USA and Canada)

This Book

Assembled for Distribution

This book was assembled by two Family Radio listeners who have grown in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior over the years (with help from the questions and answers about the Bible as heard on the *Open Forum* program and other Family Radio materials) and who desire the same for others.

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