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NOTES ON REVELATION

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The purpose of these notes is to enable the reader to come to grips quickly with the symbolism and overall message of Revelation without becoming too bogged down in detail (and is therefore best read in one sitting if possible). To this end I have not attempted to record all the possible interpretations of a particular word or passage but have simply chosen the explanation which seemed the best. Nor is it possible to explore all the possible themes and connections and structures which abound in Revelation. Rather, I hope this will serve as an introduction and reference through which the reader may discover the further treasures that John's prophecy has to offer and the riches of the Christian's heritage found in Jesus Christ.

Revelation is a message first to the seven churches (of chapters 2 and 3) and then to the Church of Jesus Christ throughout history. Any understanding of the book should have made sense to the original readers (probably living under the reign of Domitian - AD 81-96), and also to the Church in every age, not just to Christians living at the very end of time.

The message of Revelation is the gospel message. That Jesus Christ's death on the Cross was the perfect sacrifice for Sin; that through His death and resurrection He has conquered Satan and rules supreme over the world; and that because of this, all those who claim Jesus as Lord will, despite opposition, inherit eternal life. The call to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 is a call to endure in the Faith to the end. The rest of Revelation is to encourage them (and us) further in that goal.

OVERVIEW

Mystery or Revelation?

It seems like the most mis-named book in the Bible. When you consider that it's called "Revelation" most people seem to actually regard it as the greatest mystery they've ever read. To be sure, it was probably better understood by the original readers, and I know I've changed my mind numerous times over what some of the details mean. However, I'm convinced that even those who interpret the book differently can agree on the general gist of it.

1: Hang in There! (Revelation 1-3)

Revelation is written first to the seven churches mentioned in chapters two and three, and secondly to all churches in every age which experience what they did. And what did they experience? Impostors, hardship, heretics, poverty, idolatry, immorality, deadness, and lukewarmness. Even John is writing to them from the island of Patmos, where he has been banished for his faith. Obviously things are pretty crook!

But Jesus, who is described in a different way to each church (picking up from the description in chapter one), has a message for them. He praises each where praise is due, points out where they're going wrong, and where appropriate gives warnings of what will happen if they continue on the same track - In the case of Ephesus, their light will go out! Jesus doesn't mince words, but the bottom line is that he is encouraging each church to hang in there. He says, "To everyone that conquers I will give..." - what? Well it's described as "the tree of life," "the crown of life," "a white stone with a new name," "the morning star," one's name in the book of life," "made a pillar in the temple of God and have the name of God," and "the right to sit with Jesus on the throne." And each is the promise of eternal life.

Whatever your circumstances, remain faithful to God, hang on to the faith, because deliverance is at hand. As we shall see that's not just the message of the first three chapters, but of the whole book, and it's not just for them, it's for you and me.

2: Worthy is God and the Lamb. (Revelation 4-5)

If Jesus' message to the seven churches in Revelation (and to us) is to hang in there. then the rest of the book gives us good reasons for doing so. John gives a glimpse into heaven. Chapter four, verse one says, "...and there in heaven, a door stood open." And beyond the door? An awe-inspiring vision of God sitting on his throne surrounded by his merciful promises (the rainbow), special angels (elders), by the most powerful of the animal kingdom (the creatures) and signs typical of the presence of God (lightnings, rumblings and peals of thunder). The elders and creatures worship God and submit to him. "You are worthy, our Lord and God," they sing, "to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things." What better message for a minority people, feeling persecuted and discouraged, to realise that God is Lord and King. There is nothing outside of his control.

"But what of all the evil in the world!" I hear you say. "Where is justice? Will no-one put right all the evil?" That is exactly the question in 5:2.... "Who is able to open the scroll and break its seals?" For the scroll seems to represent the outworking of God's justice and judgement. Opening the seals is the way to enact God's plan of deliverance. But there is no-one worthy to do so, and John weeps for the sin of the world, the unworthiness of humankind and the apparent hopelessness

of the situation. But not for long. He is told that “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and the seven seals.” None other than Jesus Christ holds the key to the future! But when John looks, he sees, not a lion but a lamb, as if slaughtered. The pathetic figure of weakness reminds us that the way to victory is the way of suffering, for there is no hope and no glory without Jesus’ death on the cross. And the elders and creatures in an acknowledgement of Jesus’ divinity, sing, “You are worthy... by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation... and they will reign on earth.” In the midst of strife, Christians of every age can know that hope springs anew through Jesus. The scroll is to be opened, and the future laid bare. But what will it reveal?

3: Seals, Trumpets and Bowls

What follows is three series of judgements which are similar to the plagues in Egypt from Exodus: six seals (chapter 6), six trumpets (8:2 - 9:20) and six bowls (chapter 16). Some think that all these things happened symbolically prior to Jesus, others that even we have yet to see these things happen, and still others that they are the history of the world where things become worse and worse with each cycle. I think that, although the destruction becomes worse in each cycle, each is basically saying the same thing, for the seventh seal (The Silence, 8:1), the seventh trumpet (“The Kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord”) and the seventh bowl (“It is done”) denote completion, akin to a seventh day of rest, and the judgement day having arrived. It seems to me that the plagues are a picture of war, and poverty and death in every age, but that in each case God both allows them to happen but puts limitations on their destructiveness.

Now rings out the age-old question, “Why does God allow such things to happen?” Probably the best answer is that if God were simply to over-rule all human action (and the plagues here are obviously a result of human sinfulness) then he would have taken away both our freedom to choose and our humanity. But there is another reason. Chapter 9, verse 20 reads, “The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent...” It is not the only reason why people suffer, but often only in the extremities of suffering and death do people realise their need to change direction and turn to God. In the middle of the fearful images of these cycles, Revelation encourages those who have repented (ie. Christians, also known as saints) to realise that in the tragedies of the world’s history, God preserves his people.

4: Saints: “Preserve us”

The people of God on earth certainly don’t have an easy time of it! Revelation describes them as “those slaughtered for the word of God” (6:9), but also “those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand, redeemed from the earth” (7:4 & 14:1), “a great multitude that no-one could count” (7:9ff), “two witnesses”(11:3-4), “those who had been victorious over the beast” (15:2), those who came to life in the first resurrection “and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (20:5), “the Holy City, the New Jerusalem,... prepared as a bride” (chap 21), and so on. Some may wish to distinguish in these descriptions between God’s people of the Old Testament, those of the New Testament church, and those who were actually martyred, but the overall picture is of people who have remained faithful to God in the face of Satan’s onslaughts. These onslaughts are mediated through earthly rulers such as “the beast” and political systems such as “Babylon, the great mother of

prostitutes”(chaps. 13-14 & 17), who were probably a Roman emperor and the Roman Empire at the time of writing, but could just as well apply to any godless, tyrannical rulers of past, present and future ages.

Are the people of God to escape? Well, yes and no. As Christians we should not think that we will be spared persecution. In fact the picture of the two witnesses should make us expect it! However, John’s writing encourages us to realise that even in death, there is resurrection. For example, see the souls preserved under God’s altar (6:9), and the dead witnesses coming to life and going up to heaven (11:11-12). In chapter 11:1-2, it has been suggested that the city is here symbolic of God’s people, that the trampling of the “outer court” speaks of physical persecution and death, but that the temple (literally the inner sanctuary) is measured off or preserved. Yes, God’s people will escape, not physically, but in the sanctuary of the soul which will, through faith in Jesus Christ, be in the presence of God. What will that be like? Beyond description! - Nevertheless we see how John attempts to describe it at the end of his book.

5: In the end... The Beginning.

“Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, coming for to carry me home.”

Christians know that this world for all its wonder, is not home. Peter talks of us as aliens, and the original readers of Revelation would have known what he was talking about. So would those of every age who have suffered for their faith, and those who have just suffered as part of the course of life. What is it, then, in the face of prolonged hardship, deprivation, bereavement and death, that keeps people going? The same vision which inspired the negro spirituals, sparking the light at the end of the tunnel, and bringing joy even to the worst of living conditions. The same vision which completes Revelation in chapters 21 and 22.

Evil has been dealt with. God has meted out justice on the oppressors and John is able to see a new heaven and new earth where there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain, and God’s people are presented like the new city of Jerusalem, a new Israel. I remember watching the colourful spectacle of the tall ships and the fireworks at Sydney’s bicentennial celebrations. Impressive though they were, they pale into insignificance, compared with this city, a huge cube, 2,400km high, wide and deep, made from precious stones with a street of pure translucent gold, and brilliantly lit by the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, the Lamb. This is a light show, to end all light shows, and it’s you and me, the people of God! Here there is no more curse (Genesis 3) for in the street of this city is the river of the water of life, and the Tree of Life (also from Genesis) which brings healing to the nations.

The promises of eternal life, given to the seven churches, in chapters 2 and 3 are here painted in all their glory. *All* their glory? Well probably not. This is a picture of something which will be far more wonderful than we could ever describe on paper, but in the meantime it is enough to encourage us to persevere, and to continue issuing the invitation to others:-

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. (Rev 22:17 NRSV)

Revelation 1:1-20.
Introduction. Vision of One Like a Son of Man.

(1) The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.¹ He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, (2) who testifies to everything he saw - that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (3) Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

(4) John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come,² and from the seven spirits before his throne,³ (5) and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him⁴ who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, (6) and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

(7) Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

(8) "I am the Alpha and the Omega,"⁵ says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

(9) I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (10) On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,⁶ (11) which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." (12) I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands,⁷ (13) and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man,"⁸ dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. (14) His head and hair were white⁹ like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.¹⁰ (15) His feet were like bronze¹¹ glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.¹² (16) In his right hand he held seven stars

¹ The suffering of the people of God, but also of the inheritance in God's presence for those who endure

² That is, God the Father. See v8

³ Sometimes translated the seven-fold Spirit of God (So that we have Father, Son and Holy Spirit) but more likely to be seven spiritual beings, agents of God.

⁴ Jesus.

⁵ Alpha - the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega the last letter. Notice 1:18, 22:13 and 22:16 where Jesus also claims to be the first and last.

⁶ Powerful. Used to proclaim a king.

⁷ The seven churches which, in a sense, represent all of God's people, v20.

⁸ Jesus, in his kingly glory, is at the centre of the churches. 'Son of Man' means a human being, but is also a title from Daniel 7:13ff of one who is given authority. The picture which follows is of a priest (in robes and sash) and of a king.

⁹ White denotes purity, and the wisdom which is associated with age (grey hair).

¹⁰ Fire is penetrating and speaks of judgment.

¹¹ Powerful to crush opposition, bronze is not corroded by the earth it touches.

¹² Powerful, drowning out other noises

[v20], and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.¹³ His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.¹⁴ (17) When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. (18) I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.¹⁵ (19) "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. (20) The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels¹⁶ of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Revelation 2:1-29 **Messages to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira.**¹⁷

(1) "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands [1:12 &16]:

(2) I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. (3) You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

(4) Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

(5) Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

(6) But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans,¹⁸ which I also hate.

(7) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes,¹⁹ I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.²⁰

(8) "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again [1:17-18].

(9) I know your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich! I know the

¹³ Emphasises the effectiveness of his words which are the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12-13.

¹⁴ Compare this with the Transfiguration. This is a picture of Jesus' glory.

¹⁵ Hades is another name for death. Jesus, who conquered death holds the key to it.

¹⁶ Perhaps heavenly beings, but possibly messengers from the churches who will bear John's message back.

¹⁷ For a the summary of the letters to the seven churches see the end of this booklet.

¹⁸ Possibly a sect which believed that the body was of no importance, only the spirit. This led them to believe that they could do whatever they liked.

¹⁹ To overcome is to hold on to the faith to the end, no matter what the persecution. Many of John's readers were required by the authorities to state each year that the Roman Emperor was a god. To refuse could mean death. John encourages them to resist the temptation to give in.

²⁰ Imagery from the Garden of Eden, of perfection and eternal life.

ETERNAL LIFE belongs to a people as soon as they become Christians but they enter into it fully when they finally stands before God.

slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.²¹

(10) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.²² Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.²³

(11) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.²⁴

(12) "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword [1:16].

(13) I know where you live - where Satan has his throne.²⁵ Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city - where Satan lives.

(14) Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality [Numbers 22:1-7, 25:1-3, 31:16]. (15) Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans [2:6]. (16) Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

(17) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna.²⁶ I will also give him a white stone²⁷ with a new name²⁸ written on it, known only to him who receives it.

(18) "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze [1:14-15].

(19) I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

(20) Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel,²⁹ who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. (21) I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. (22) So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. (23) I will strike her children dead. Then all the

²¹ Jews who claimed to be the People of God and yet were opposing His Christian people and therefore allying themselves with Satan.

²² Numbers are to be taken symbolically in this style of literature. Ten just represents a limited period. God is in control even here.

²³ That is, eternal life.

²⁴ The punishment of God on the Judgment Day.

²⁵ Possibly a reference to the fact that Emperor Worship began in that city.

²⁶ It was widely believed that when the Messiah came, the Manna - reputed to have been hidden by Jeremiah when the Temple was ransacked - would reappear. As such it seems to be a symbol of God's supply and sustenance, and here eternal life.

²⁷ Stones were often used as admission 'tickets' to events. Once again, a symbol of admission to eternal life. White could represent the purity given by Jesus.

²⁸ Jesus' name, or that of the one who overcomes?

²⁹ Someone in that congregation leading people astray as King Ahab's wife, Jezebel, did with Israel - see 1 Kings 18:19 for example.

churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

(24) Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets³⁰ (I will not impose any other burden on you): (25) Only hold on to what you have until I come.

(26) To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations³¹ - (27) 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' - just as I have received authority from my Father. (28) I will also give him the morning star.³²

(29) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 3:1-22 **Messages to Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.**

(1) "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits [1:4] of God and the seven stars [1:16].

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. (2) Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. (3) Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief,³³ and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

(4) Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.

They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.³⁴ (5) He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life,³⁵ but will acknowledge his name before my Father³⁶ and his angels. (6) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

(7) "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.³⁷ What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. (8) I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.³⁸ I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not

³⁰ Probably a reference to Occultic 'knowledge' and practices.

³¹ Christians are to share Christ's rule. The unfolding of Revelation in this regard has close parallels with Psalm 2.

³² The Morning Star, being bright and enduring, is another symbol of Eternal Life. It is also Jesus himself in 22:16.

³³ Matthew 24:42-44, Luke 12:38-40.

³⁴ To be worthy is to be counted as pure through what Christ has done, rather than by their own efforts.

³⁵ Rev 13:8, 17:8, 20:12-15, 27. To be in the Book of Life is to be a Christian. The book is another symbol of Eternal Life.

³⁶ That is, to be accepted. Mark 8:38 shows the opposite. To be ashamed of Jesus in this life is for Him to be ashamed of that person in the next life.

³⁷ To hold the key of David is to be a true Jew or more particularly God's anointed. Jesus was of the line of King David and holds kingly authority [Isaiah 22:21-23].

³⁸ Keys speak of opening doors. Jesus opened the door to Eternal Life and holds the key to it. Furthermore, keys and doors speak of opportunities, in this case possibly that of witnessing to the tribes living east of the city.

denied my name. (9) I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan [2:9], who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars - I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. (10) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial³⁹ that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. (11) I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown [2:10]. (12) Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.⁴⁰ Never again will he leave it. I will write on him⁴¹ the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem,⁴² which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.⁴³

(13) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

(14) "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen,⁴⁴ the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

(15) I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! (16) So, because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (17) You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

(18) I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear [3:5], so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. (19) Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

(20) Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (21) To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

(22) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Revelation 4:1-11

The Throne in Heaven with 24 Elders and 4 Creatures.

(1) After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open⁴⁵ in heaven [3:8]. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet [1:10] said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

³⁹ Those who serve Satan suffer at his hands in this life. Sin itself also brings suffering and judgment in this life. The hour of trial could be a particular disaster, or it could refer to the time just prior to or at the final Judgment.

⁴⁰ The Temple of God is the dwelling place of God and is now individual believers [1 Corinthians 6:19] and also a church of believers [1 Corinthians 3:16-17]. To be a pillar is, therefore, to be in His presence and part of His dwelling place.

⁴¹ To be written on is to be owned by the writer. Here there is a triple claim of ownership.

⁴² Jerusalem, the city and dwelling of God, is similar to the Temple in idea [v12]. It is the people of God from every age.

⁴³ That of Jesus, risen and glorified?

⁴⁴ Amen means 'truly' in Greek. Jesus is the true, dependable and faithful one.

⁴⁵ Literally: 'Having been opened'. The way into heaven has already been opened, and remains open because of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension.

(2) At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. (3) And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.⁴⁶ A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.⁴⁷ (4) Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders.⁴⁸ They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. (5) From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.⁴⁹ Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God [1:4]. (6) Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.⁵⁰ In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures,⁵¹ and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.⁵² (7) The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. (8) Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (9) Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne⁵³ and say:

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

Revelation 5:1-14 **The Scroll and Jesus who is worthy to open it.**

(1) Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll⁵⁴ with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. (2) And I saw a mighty angel

⁴⁶ God cannot be described except in terms of precious stones.

⁴⁷ A rainbow reminds us of God's promises (as with Noah). Here God is shown encircled by His promises. He is faithful.

⁴⁸ If the "Elders" are those Christians who have overcome. (See the promises to those who do so in 2:10 and 3:5), then "twenty-four" may have to do with the twelve tribes and twelve apostles mentioned in 21:12-14. However others believe the Elders to be a higher rank of angelic beings who offer the prayers of the saints (5:8 cf 8:3) especially since Christians (144,000) sing a song the Elders cannot sing (14:3).

As such they probably reflect in heaven the gathering of God's people (apostles and tribes. OT& NT).

⁴⁹ This description is associated with God's presence. Compare it with the rumblings that occurred when Moses met with God on Sinai, (Exodus 19:18). See also Rev 8:5, 11:19 and 16:18.

⁵⁰ The sea is usually a symbol of chaos. The abode of evil. Before God, though, it is completely under His control and is calm.

⁵¹ These creatures represent the animal creation. The kingly and noble lion, the strong ox, humankind, and the strongest and most noble bird, the eagle.

⁵² Eyes denote insight and understanding. In this case insight into the character and nature of God, which causes the creatures to render praise to Him for His holiness, power, authority and eternal presence, v8.

⁵³ Those who overcame have been given authority (they sit on the thrones), but they submit to God's authority in word and deed. They owe their very existence to the Creator.

⁵⁴ The scroll is probably a reference to Ezekiel 2:9-10 where it is concerned with judgment. It contains the destiny of people in history.

proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (3) But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. (4) I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.⁵⁵ (5) Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,⁵⁶ has triumphed.⁵⁷ He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

(6) Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain,⁵⁸ standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes,⁵⁹ which are the seven spirits of God [1:4] sent out into all the earth.

(7) He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. (8) And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.⁶⁰ (9) And they sang a new song:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. (10) You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."⁶¹

(11) Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. (12) In a loud voice they sang:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"

(13) Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

⁵⁵ The breaking of the seal of a legal document causes the contents of that document to be acted upon. That no-one can open the scroll suggests that there is therefore no future for humankind, since no-one could bring about the judgements and blessings of God (which were the contents of the scroll). The failure to find someone is the failure and wretchedness of sinful humankind.

⁵⁶ Of the kingly Davidic line. The promised Messiah.

⁵⁷ The Greek shows that this action of having triumphed is already complete. It is the victory of the Cross and it is a triumph, not over a particular thing, but over everything. The triumph is absolute.

⁵⁸ It is not a warrior but a Lamb which triumphed. It is in Jesus' death on the Cross that victory came about. The Lamb reminds us of John the Baptist's words, 'Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. The lamb was used as a sacrifice. The blood of the Lamb is associated with the Passover in Egypt, for when the lamb's blood was seen around the door the angel of death passed over. Thus Israel were delivered from the bondage of Egypt.

Here the Lamb (Jesus) stands where God is, at the centre of the throne.

The Lamb who is able to open up the future has made that future possible by his death and resurrection.

⁵⁹ Horns symbolise power. Eyes symbolise knowledge and insight.

⁶⁰ The prayers of believers, precious before God, are for justice to be done. Now this is made possible through the triumph of Jesus Christ who has the authority and power to bring judgment to bear.

⁶¹ Christians are already a kingdom and priests (representatives of God mediating the gospel to the world). Even now they reign on earth. (In some ancient manuscripts the present tense is used, but either way the action of reigning results from the death and resurrection of Christ).

(14) The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.⁶²

Revelation 6:1-17
4 Seals of destruction. 5th, Christians Preserved.
6th, the Judgment of God.

(1) I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals.⁶³ Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" (2) I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.⁶⁴

(3) When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" (4) Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.⁶⁵

(5) When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. (6) Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"⁶⁶

(7) When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" (8) I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.⁶⁷

(9) When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. (10) They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (11) Then each of them was given a white robe [3:4-5], and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.⁶⁸

⁶² The whole creation has joined in the worship.

⁶³ The opening of the sequence of seals first unleashes the 'Four Horses of the Apocalypse'. The seven seals will be followed by seven trumpets announcing plagues. Seven bowls follow in chapter 16, also plagues spilled on the earth. In each of these three sequences the destruction increases from a quarter, to a third, to complete. The Judgement Day is denoted at or near the end of each sequence.

⁶⁴ The rider of the white horse could be Jesus himself who ushers in judgement. Others understand him to be the Roman Empire in John's day, and conquering leaders of other ages. He could therefore represent the judgment of God on the world through human agents.

⁶⁵ The natural result of the first horseman, war.

⁶⁶ The natural result of war is want. Prices soar but are still limited. Humankind's sin is not allowed to run its full course, so oil and wine are not harmed. Remember it is the cross that has given Jesus Christ the control of history.

⁶⁷ Death is the result of war and want (Hades is another name for the grave). Even this is given limitations though, in this case to one quarter of the earth.

⁶⁸ The martyrs of every age are protected by God (under the altar). Their call is not just for vengeance but for justice to be done. That they are told to wait shows once again that God is in control of events, and that in his mercy he gives people time to repent.

(12) I watched as he opened the sixth seal.⁶⁹ There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, (13) and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. (14) The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. (15) Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. (16) They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! (17) For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"⁷⁰

Revelation 7:1-17 **Those who can stand on the Day of Wrath -** **The 144 000 and the Great Multitude.**

(1) After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.⁷¹

(2) Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: (3) "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." (4) Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.⁷²

(5) From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,

from the tribe of Gad 12,000, (6) from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,

(7) from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, (8) from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

(9) After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.⁷³ They were wearing white robes and were holding

⁶⁹ The first four seals were judgment throughout the ages. The sixth seal is the coming of the Day of Wrath - God's judgment. The description is probably not to be taken too literally. Earthquakes are often symbolic of the overthrow of earthly powers. Stars could similarly mean powers. It is a picture evoking the great fear of facing God's anger. Compare with Matthew 24:29-30 where the warning is to keep watch. Also see Amos 8:9-13.

⁷⁰ This question will be answered by the next chapter.

⁷¹ The four winds may parallel the four horsemen, but it seems more likely to be the judgment of God, withheld at His command to give opportunity for more people to respond to Him v3.

⁷² The 144,000 could be those of the Old Testament who were faithful to God, or they could be identical with the Great Multitude of v9, that is ALL Believers. I believe that *in particular* they are the martyrs of both the Old and New Testaments and throughout the ages. John, in Revelation does however talk about all believers as if they were martyrs, and as such the 144,000 seem therefore to be *representative* of that Great Multitude of all believers.

They are read out by tribes as a military roll call. These are the soldiers of Christ engaged in a holy war and we will see them again in 14:3.

The 12 tribes remind us that they are God's people, and that Christians are the New Israel.

⁷³ Through the deaths of the martyrs God brings increase to His people. John now sees beyond the martyrs to the great multitude who have become believers, and they too are called on to suffer

palm branches in their hands. (10) And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

(11) All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, (12) saying:

"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

(13) Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?" (14) I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."⁷⁴ (15) Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them."⁷⁵ (16) Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. (17) For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Revelation 8:1-13

Four Trumpets. God's Judgment in Plagues on the Earth.

(1) When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.⁷⁶

(2) And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

(3) Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. (4) The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. (5) Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake [4:5].

(6) Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.⁷⁷

(7) The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.⁷⁸

in this age of the great tribulation. As a result of their endurance in the Faith, however, they have forgiveness and a place of security within God's fold.

⁷⁴ Washing of robes speaks of identification with Christ's death, of remaining faithful to the point of martyrdom.

⁷⁵ A sign of God's protection.

⁷⁶ The silence may be a dramatic pause for effect, or it may be an opportunity for reflection on what has already occurred. It may also correspond to the day of rest and denote completion of this cycle of plagues. This seventh seal ushers in the sequence of seven trumpets which culminate in judgement and heaven being opened. These are later followed by seven bowls where the seventh denotes judgement.

⁷⁷ The trumpets appear to sound in response to the prayers of God's people (as precious as incense) for God's justice to be done. The fire of verse 5 speaks of judgment.

What follows is like the plagues in Egypt. They are 'natural' disasters which are almost a reversal of creation. The trumpets proclaim the curses that have come upon mankind because of sin.

⁷⁸ Vegetation is ruined, but only a third. Limitations are still set by God in His mercy.

(8) The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, (9) a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.⁷⁹

(10) The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water - (11) the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.⁸⁰

(12) The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.⁸¹

(13) As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

Revelation 9:1-21 The Fifth & Sixth Trumpets (First two `Woes'). The Devils Hoards. Death.

(1) The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star⁸² that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. (2) When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. (3) And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.⁸³ (4) They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.⁸⁴ (5) They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. (6) During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

(7) The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. (8) Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. (9) They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. (10) They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months.⁸⁵ (11) They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in

⁷⁹ Sea creatures are destroyed along with ships, and by implication, trade. We see that these plagues occur in every age.

⁸⁰ Drinking water and people affected. Contrast this with 7:16.

Wormwood means bitterness and may well represent Babylon, the symbol of captivity and idolatry for the People of Israel in the Old Testament [Jeremiah 20:4, 21:10]. Babylon's practices poison the living water that God offers [Jeremiah 2:13].

⁸¹ Even light itself is affected.

⁸² Some believe that this is Satan with the keys to the Abyss. However it could be another angel of God (Compare with v11 and 20:1). After all God controls the Abyss, not Satan.

⁸³ This is like the plague in Egypt from Exodus.

⁸⁴ Those who have rejected God suffer in this judgement.

⁸⁵ A limited time.

Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.⁸⁶

(12) The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

(13) The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. (14) It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." (15) And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. (16) The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

(17) The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulphur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulphur. (18) A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of their mouths. (19) The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.⁸⁷

(20) The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. (21) Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Revelation 10:1-11 **The angel with the scroll of witness.**

(1) Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars.⁸⁸ (2) He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, (3) and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. (4) And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."⁸⁹

(5) Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. (6) And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! (7) But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Destroyer.

⁸⁷ The first two woes speak of death and destruction, but it is not total. Only a third is killed. It appears to indicate physical death generally, which is part of the curse of sin. Frequently the tribulations of life and death cause the non-Christian to stop for a moment and wonder, but too often they do not move him sufficiently to repent and seek God [vv20-21]. Death itself is therefore a warning.

⁸⁸ This messenger is a representative of God in the sense that he is enveloped in the presence of God (the cloud [1:7, 14:14-15]) and the promises of God (the rainbow [4:3]). His control is demonstrated by the fact that his feet stand on land and sea.

⁸⁹ No reason is given for this. There are some things we do not need to know yet, or perhaps which we are not ready for.

⁹⁰ The mystery is accomplished in Jesus Christ with his death and resurrection. The prophets pointed to

(8) Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." (9) So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey."⁹¹ (10) I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. (11) Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

Revelation 11:1-19 The Two Witnesses

(1) I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there."⁹² (2) But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. (3) And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."⁹³ (4) These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth."⁹⁴ (5) If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. (6) These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want."⁹⁵

(7) Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. (8) Their bodies will lie

it but it was not clear to them. To us however the mystery is revealed (see note on 17:5).

⁹¹ The little scroll is the message of the gospel which is salvation (sweet) for those who accept it and condemnation (bitter) for those who reject. John is to take it in himself, and in that sense it is 'sweet' for it brings eternal life. But as the gospel is proclaimed it meets with opposition and persecution, and in that way it is 'bitter'. Despite that, John is told that he must prophesy (proclaim the message) to everyone. The 'Two Witnesses' in the next chapter are an example of this.

⁹² The Temple is literally the *inner sanctuary*. It is measured off and, with the worshippers (God's People), set apart for God. In other words, as the People of God, they are set aside for Him and their souls are protected in His presence.

However the outer Temple court, corresponding to their physical lives, is guaranteed no such protection. Christians can expect to suffer persecution, but God will protect their relationship to Him.

NOTE: PEOPLE OF GOD includes those who were faithful to Him in the Old Testament and especially those who are Christians in the New Testament and beyond.

⁹³ The time of persecution (the trampling) and the time of witnessing (prophesying) are the same. Witnessing and persecution go hand in hand. The three and a half years have connections with Daniel 12. There they are a period from the beginning of the end to the end itself, which is the age in which we now live.

The two witnesses are representative of God's People as a whole. For us they are His church.

⁹⁴ In Zechariah 4:1-14 the lampstand is Israel and is therefore symbolic of the witness of God's People (the lampstand bears the lamp or light) [1:20]. The olive trees were Zerubbabel, the anointed king, and Joshua, the anointed priest (not to be confused with Moses' successor). These two were anointed "to serve the Lord of all the earth" [Zech 4:14] and therefore also represent the whole People of God.

⁹⁵ These witnesses are also likened to Elijah (shutting up the sky) and Moses (turning waters to blood) THE two great prophets of the Old Testament.

in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.⁹⁶ (9) For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. (10) The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.⁹⁷

(11) But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. (12) Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.⁹⁸

(13) At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.⁹⁹

(14) The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

(15) The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

(16) And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, (17) saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.¹⁰⁰ (18) The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

(19) Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant.¹⁰¹ And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm [4:5, 8:5].

⁹⁶ The beast was Rome then, but it is also all opposition to those who proclaim the gospel throughout the ages.

The city is Sodom in that it is full of wickedness, and Egypt because that speaks of captivity, hardship and existence in an alien land. It is Jerusalem in that she rejected and crucified Jesus. However, in the context of John's writing it would have been Rome and its Empire.

⁹⁷ The preaching of God's Word convicts people (the fire from the mouths of the witnesses. By removing the witnesses who prick their consciences they think that the problem is removed, and they rejoice.

⁹⁸ The martyrs, those who die in Christ, are resurrected to eternal life. The three and a half days may recall Daniel 9:27 where Antiochus IV marched into Jerusalem, desecrated the Temple and put an end to sacrifice for 'half a week'. That is, it represents a period of strong opposition to God's People perhaps most particularly towards the end of this age (See comments at 20:3).

⁹⁹ This second Woe indicates God's judgment on those who have persecuted God's People. The judgment is limited to 7000 so that others may learn the lesson and repent. 7000 corresponds to the number of those who remained faithful to God in the face of the idolatry and persecution of Elijah's day. Thus the retribution involves the same number.

¹⁰⁰ Seven denotes completion. Jesus has already begun to reign through his death and resurrection, but that reign culminates in the Judgment Day, a time of rewards for God's People and punishment for those who are not.

¹⁰¹ The Ark reminds us of the presence of God with His People.

Revelation 12:1-13:1
Persecution of the Church. Satan defeated by the Cross.

(1) A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman¹⁰² clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars¹⁰³ on her head. (2) She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.¹⁰⁴

(3) Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.¹⁰⁵ (4) His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth [Dan 8:10]¹⁰⁶. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. (5) She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.¹⁰⁷ (6) The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.¹⁰⁸

(7) And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.¹⁰⁹ (8) But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven [lit: `not even a trace of them was found in heaven']. (9) The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

(10) Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them

¹⁰² The "woman" as this chapter progresses, obviously gives birth to Jesus. But she is not just Mary, but a `sign' or symbol of all those who were looking for, and welcomed the appearance of the Lord. She is Israel, and the New Israel, the church of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰³ Twelve indicates the number of God's people (Twelve tribes of Israel, twelve disciples etc). The sun, moon and stars remind us of Genesis 37:9-11 as the family of Israel (the name given to Jacob).

¹⁰⁴ The suffering of the loyal people of God waiting for their Messiah.

¹⁰⁵ The dragon is the serpent, the Devil, the Satan (adversary) v9.

The seven heads could be an identification with Leviathan, an ocean dragon from the myths of Canaan long before, or they may be connected with the beasts of Daniel 7, whose heads total seven. The fourth beast in that chapter has ten horns which are identified as world powers. The crowns speak of authority.

¹⁰⁶ Flinging the stars to earth is symbolic of Satan's power. The imagery from Daniel suggests the idea of trampling upon God's people.

¹⁰⁷ We appear to jump from Jesus' birth to his ascension to heaven, but the `birth' and `devouring' have more to do with the crucifixion. Through Jesus' death all things were to be made new.

¹⁰⁸ These verses are rich in the symbolism of the Exodus. Now the Dragon is like Egypt, and the desert reminds us of the Exodus flight through God's deliverance of his people.

The 1260 days (42 months of Rev 11:2-3) is the time when the church is to be trampled outwardly, but inwardly, spiritually, is being protected and nurtured by God. The background to this time period is in the `Time, times and half a time' (three and a half years) associated with the suffering of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes IV in 167-164BC, which was foretold in Daniel.

¹⁰⁹ War in heaven parallels some reality on earth. Michael fights rather than Jesus because this battle is the counterpart to what is occurring as Jesus dies on the Cross! It was then that Satan was decisively defeated.

before our God day and night, has been hurled down. (11) They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.¹¹⁰ (12) Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

(13) When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. (14) The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle [Isa 40:31], so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time,¹¹¹ out of the serpent's reach. (15) Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.¹¹² (16) But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.¹¹³ (17) Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring - those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.¹¹⁴

Revelation 13:1 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.¹¹⁵

Revelation 13:1-18 **The Beast of Rome and Another Beast**

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea.¹¹⁶ He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. (2) The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. (3) One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.¹¹⁷ The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. (4) Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the

¹¹⁰ The victory of the martyrs is also bound up in the Cross of Christ. They triumph with him through that event.

¹¹¹ Three and a half years, 1260 days or 42 months. See v6

¹¹² Water is the Satan's weapon. It often represents chaos.

¹¹³ Satan's persecution of the church (The Woman) is ultimately thwarted by God's protection. Once again Exodus imagery comes to the fore, this time with the symbolism of the deliverance through the Red Sea. To find sustenance in the desert is to be enabled to remain faithful to Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁴ Satan, having failed to destroy the people of God as a whole, continues now to strike out at individuals.

¹¹⁵ Satan is looking for reinforcements

¹¹⁶ This beast is in the first instance the Roman Empire with all its power and might (also symbolised by the leopard, bear and lion) See Daniel 7 esp verses 7 and 25. It comes from the sea, the place of evil and chaos.

Seven heads, the seven hills on which Rome is built (see also 17:3).

Ten horns representing the power of successive crowned emperors.

The blasphemous names remind us of the claims of the emperors to godhood.

The beast is a political incarnation of Satan which may also apply to any age in history.

¹¹⁷ The reference is probably to Nero, whose death almost brought about the fall of the Roman Empire (the beast). There were rumours that he was not dead and would return. The Empire recovered, however, with succeeding emperors.

History bears out the fact that the beast continues to live in ungodly nations and leaders from century to century.

beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"

(5) The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months [11:2, 12:6] (6) He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. (7) He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. (8) All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast¹¹⁸ - all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.¹¹⁹

(9) He who has an ear, let him hear.

(10) If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go.

If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.¹²⁰

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

(11) Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.¹²¹ (12) He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. (13) And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. (14) Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. (15) He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. (16) He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, (17) so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. (18) This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.¹²²

¹¹⁸ "All the inhabitants of the world" could simply refer to the Roman Empire of John's day.

¹¹⁹ God's plan of redemption in Christ's death goes back to creation.

¹²⁰ Jeremiah 15:2. The warning is to those who rebel against God, but it is an encouragement to Believers that they should endure, for God's justice will be done. Some see the second beast as a counterfeit Messiah (Ref to "Lamb").

¹²¹ This 'other beast' is probably the Commune Asiae who had control in Asia (modern Turkey) of the imperial cult. It was this local body which forced people to worship the emperor.

This body is a parody of Jesus Christ. Lamb-like, but with the power of Satan. It is also a pseudo-Elijah, calling fire from heaven preparing the way for a false Messiah (there may have been magical arts or trickery practised for occultic mysticism was well known).

¹²² The mark would have been the imperial stamp used on commercial documents.

The people who give allegiance to the beast are invisibly marked as belonging to him.

666 - John is inviting his readers to engage in gematria, where letters of the alphabet were given numbers. The identity or identities of 666 may have been obvious to an intelligent reader of John's day, but they are lost to us. It may be better to see it as a number that always falls short of the 7, the number of completeness.

Revelation 14:1-20 Judgment on `Babylon' and its inhabitants.

(1) Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion,¹²³ and with him 144,000¹²⁴ who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. (3) And they sang a new song¹²⁵ before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.¹²⁶ (4) These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure.¹²⁷ They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.¹²⁸ They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits¹²⁹ to God and the Lamb. (5) No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

(6) Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim¹³⁰ to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people. (7) He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."¹³¹

(8) A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."¹³²

¹²³ Jerusalem and especially the Temple site is Mt Zion. Figuratively it is the dwelling place of God. Compare this with Psalm 2, particularly verse 6.

¹²⁴ See the footnote for 7:4.

These are the martyrs representative of all believers. See footnote on 'firstfruits' in verse 4.

¹²⁵ The New Song's content is seen in 5:9 and 7:10.

¹²⁶ The 144,000 have been redeemed [bought] by Christ's death.

¹²⁷ The 144,000 are pure because of Christ's death but they remained pure by not defiling themselves with women. This could refer to the prostitution often associated with the temples of idol worship (ie. they did not follow the way of idolatry) or it may have to do with the singlemindedness of the soldier engaged in battle (since in chapter 7 the 144,000 have already been listed as in a military census).

¹²⁸ Compare with Luke 14:26. Here is the dedication of the soldier. See also Matthew 10:38, 16:24, Mark 10:38-39 and John 13:36.

¹²⁹ Firstfruits were the first part of a person's produce which was offered to God. As such it demonstrated that God was first in all things and that He owned the rest of the produce. It was the guarantee of the rest. These martyrs, the 144,000, are then the first offering to God, guaranteeing more believers to come, because of the witness of their sacrifice. The fact that they are unblemished [v5 `blameless'] reminds us of the practice of sacrificing of animals which were to be without spot. It reminds us too that they follow THE LAMB who was sacrificed for them. Isaiah 53:9 describes Him as the one with `no deceit in his mouth'.

¹³⁰ Although this angel has the gospel, his words do not appear to spell out the gospel message (good news). It may be assumed that the readers already knew its content. However, judgment is also a result of the preaching of the gospel, for it divides people into the two groups of those who have responded to, and those who have rejected the message.

¹³¹ Contrast this with the plagues of 8:7-12.

¹³² Babylon was the place of exile and captivity for the Old Testament Jews [Jeremiah 51:6-10]. It symbolises idolatry and witchcraft and bondage to this world (a symbolic sense of `adulteries'). It would also have been associated with the Roman Empire because of its idolatry, emperor worship and persecution of God's people.

The message is that this way of life is doomed to God's judgment. Its fate is already set, and in the

(9) A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand [13:11-18], (10) he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulphur¹³³ in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night¹³⁴ for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

(12) This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints [13:10] who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

(13) Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labour [verse 11], for their deeds will follow them."¹³⁵

(14) I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.¹³⁶

(15) Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." (16) So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

(17) Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.

(18) Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." (19) The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.¹³⁷

following verses we see that all those individuals who subscribe to and continue in its way of life will also suffer God's wrath.

¹³³ The burning sulphur is probably not literal, but still expresses vividly the anguish and horror of meeting with God's anger.

¹³⁴ Contrast this with verse 13. 'Rest' is the promise of being in God's presence. We experience that Rest in being at peace with God through Jesus Christ, but we enter into it fully in heaven. Hebrews 3-4 exhorts Christians to remain faithful in order to enter that Rest.

¹³⁵ John is thinking particularly of the martyrs who will die in Christ, for their witness will be the means of bringing others to Christ. Those will be the deeds that follow.

¹³⁶ Jesus is depicted in the gospels coming on the clouds [Matthew 24:30-31, Mark 13:26-27]. However, this 'one like a son of man' may be Jesus himself, but is perhaps more likely to be an angel as His representative. Harvesting and sickles are associated with the ingathering of rebellious people for judgment.

¹³⁷ 1600 is obscure. As 40x40 it may allude to the idea of the wilderness or judgment (Noah's flood rains lasted 40 days and 40 nights: Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness for disobedience). 'Outside the city', those who are judged suffer separation from any form of security.

Revelation 15:1-8
Those who are victorious.
An introduction to the 7 Plagues.

(1) I saw in heaven another great and marvellous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

(2) And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire¹³⁸ and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God (3) and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

"Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. (4) Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

(5) After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. (6) Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues.¹³⁹ They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. (7) Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. (8) And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.¹⁴⁰

Revelation 16:1-21
7 Plagues from Bowls.
Total in their effect.

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

(2) The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image [13:14].

(3) The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.¹⁴¹

(4) The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

(5) Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

"You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One,

¹³⁸ See the footnote on 4:6. The sea here is part of the imagery of the Exodus. We have the plagues; the sea with fire reminding us of the judgment on the Egyptian army which perished while trying to cross; those who escape and are victorious beside the sea, reminding us of the people of Israel who passed over safely; we find them singing the song of Moses [Exodus 15:1ff]; and we have mention of the tabernacle of the Testimony, the tent which the people of Israel used in the wilderness.

In the Old Testament the Exodus was THE great act of deliverance by God. Here the imagery is used to show us another, even greater deliverance. The final Day of the Lord.

¹³⁹ The plagues are sent from the presence of God (the Temple/tabernacle).

¹⁴⁰ Compare with the glory of God in Solomon's Temple [1 Kings 8:10-11]. This is however a far more horrific occasion.

¹⁴¹ There are no fractions here, as with the 7 seals and 7 trumpets. ALL is destroyed.

because you have so judged; (6) for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

(7) And I heard the altar respond:

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

(8) The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. (9) They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.¹⁴²

(10) The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony (11) and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done [v9].

(12) The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.¹⁴³ (13) Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs;¹⁴⁴ they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.¹⁴⁵ (14) They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. (15) "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." (16) Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.¹⁴⁶

(17) The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" (18) Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake [4:48]. (19) The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. (20) Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. (21) From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

¹⁴² Even here the plagues are sent to prompt people towards repentance. However, they do not respond.

¹⁴³ The Euphrates is the region from which destruction comes, see 9:14.

¹⁴⁴ Frogs are examples of 'unclean' creatures in biblical times.

¹⁴⁵ The dragon - The Devil

The beast - Especially Rome, but also this world and its structures.

The false prophet - Probably the second beast [13:11-14].

¹⁴⁶ Armageddon - Literally Mount Megiddo. The area has been the site of various notable battles.

Although there may be a literal great Middle Eastern battle some time in the future, here it is the final Day of the Lord when God's justice will be done. Satan is gathering for the battle, but while the destruction of the might of Rome is more immediately on view (Rome is also known as Egypt and Babylon), it is a picture of all God's enemies meeting with their destruction (v19).

Revelation 17:1-18 The Punishment of the Great Prostitute.

(1) One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters."¹⁴⁷ (2) With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

(3) Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.¹⁴⁸ (4) The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.¹⁴⁹ (5) This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY¹⁵⁰ BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (6) I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

(7) Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns.

(8) The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.¹⁵¹ The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. (9) "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. (10) They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. (11) The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. (12) "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour¹⁵² will receive authority as kings along with the beast. (13) They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.

(14) They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them

¹⁴⁷ The great prostitute is idolatry and she is to be found in Babylon [Jeremiah 51], in Egypt, in Jerusalem [Ezekiel 16 & 23] and in Rome [v18]. She is a figure of all those influences which have led people away from God and have ultimately led to the imprisonment, persecution and killing of God's people in every age. As she represents the city of Rome, the centre of the Empire, she is to be destroyed by those within that Empire (the beast) [v16-17].

The many waters are probably an allusion to Rome's control of peoples and trade [v15].

¹⁴⁸ Here she is influencing Rome, situated on seven hills which are also rulers, with ten other rulers (horns) and the idolatry of emperor worship (blasphemous names). It is difficult to assign exact names to these rulers of Rome. For us it is better to see the wider symbolism of the power and influence which the nation represents.

¹⁴⁹ Adulteries - idolatry.

¹⁵⁰ A mystery is not a puzzle to work out. It is something that has either been revealed and understood, or it has not.

¹⁵¹ A parody of the description of God in 1:4. It probably refers to the times of systematic persecution which were exercised by Rome from time to time. 'Is not' would indicate that at the time of writing there was no organised persecution.

The abyss is the realm of Satan from which his influence arises [9:2].

¹⁵² A short, limited period.

because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

(15) Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. (16) The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.¹⁵³ (17) For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. (18) The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Revelation 18:1-24 Babylon is thrown down.

(1) After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendour. (2) With a mighty voice he shouted:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. (3) For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

(4) Then I heard another voice from heaven say: Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; (5) for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. (6) Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. (7) Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.

In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' (8) Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

(9) "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. (10) Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!" (11) "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more - (12) cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; (13) cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. (14) "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendour have vanished, never to be recovered.'

(15) The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn (16) and cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! (17) In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all

¹⁵³ Perhaps John has here the idea of the Roman Empire turned in on itself and ultimately destroying itself and its influences under God's hand [v17][see note on 17:1]. In the end this is always the fate of evil influences and the nations and individuals which propagate them. See also 9:3-5 where Satan's hoards torture those without God's seal.

who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. (18) When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, `Was there ever a city like this great city?' (19) They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!

(20) Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you." (21) Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again."¹⁵⁴ (22) The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. (23) The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. (24) In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."

Revelation 19:1-21 **Rejoicing of God's People. The Rider on the White Horse.**

(1) After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, (2) for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries [17:1ff]. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." [6:10-11]

(3) And again they shouted:

"Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

(4) The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

"Amen, Hallelujah!"

(5) Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

"Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!"¹⁵⁵

(6) Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

"Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. (7) Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. (8) Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)¹⁵⁶

(9) Then the angel said to me, "Write: `Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'"[Mat 22:2-14] And he added, "These are the true words of God."

¹⁵⁴ Babylon, the symbol of evil, witchcraft and idolatry will bring the collapse of powers and nations in every age. Here, though, is the defeat by God's final judgment.

¹⁵⁵ There is no distinction between people. Small and great are together, whether it is the saints or their enemies (19:18).

¹⁵⁶ The righteous acts of the saints are a response to the salvation they have received. Contrast their dress with that of the prostitute in 17:4.

(10) At this I fell at his feet to worship him.¹⁵⁷ But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."¹⁵⁸

(11) I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True.¹⁵⁹ With justice he judges and makes war. (12) His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.¹⁶⁰ (13) He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood,¹⁶¹ and his name is the Word of God.¹⁶² (14) The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. (15) Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword [1:12, 2:12, 2:16] with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron sceptre." [Rev 3:27, Psa 2:9]. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty [14:19]. (16) On his robe and on his thigh¹⁶³ he has this name written:
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

(17) And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, (18) so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." [19:5].

(19) Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. (20) But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf [fn on 16:13]. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur.

(21) The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Revelation 20:1-15 **The Millennium,¹⁶⁴ Satan Destroyed, Dead Judged.**

(1) And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. (2) He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.¹⁶⁵ (3) He

¹⁵⁷ Even John falls victim to the idolatry of angel worship. Note that the godhood of Jesus is affirmed in that He too is worshipped (5:12-13 for example).

This episode is repeated in 22:8-9 to emphasise the great danger of falling into idolatry.

¹⁵⁸ The angel says that he is not above Christians in importance. John is equally important in the task of testifying concerning Jesus through prophecy. And it is Jesus' testimony to God that is the motivation and subject of prophecy in the New Testament.

¹⁵⁹ This is Jesus Christ.

¹⁶⁰ Even after all the names for Jesus have been put together, there are still aspects about him that are not known. Perhaps this name will be revealed at his second coming?

¹⁶¹ It is through his death on the cross that Jesus is conqueror and so proclaimed King of kings and Lord of lords.

¹⁶² The Word tells us about the very character of a person. Note John, chapter 1. Those that have seen Jesus have seen God (John 14:9).

¹⁶³ This would be the most exposed part of his cloak. The name could not be missed.

¹⁶⁴ See three views on the Millennium near the end of this booklet.

¹⁶⁵ In 12:7ff Michael makes war as the counterpart to Jesus' victory on the cross. Here in chapter 20 we appear to have the same event described slightly differently. Whereas in chapter 12 Satan was

threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations¹⁶⁶ anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.¹⁶⁷

(4) I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (5) (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.¹⁶⁸ (6) Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

(7) When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison (8) and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog¹⁶⁹ - to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. (9) They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (10) And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

(11) Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.¹⁷⁰ (12) And I saw the

flung to earth, here he is flung into the Abyss. In 12 he is shown as defeated, but waging war on the saints, while in 20 he is defeated and his power to deceive is curtailed for '1000 years' (the Millennium). Like other numbers in Revelation this should not be taken literally and probably refers to the age in which we now live (that is, from the Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, through to his Second Coming, the Day of the Lord, although the start of this reign could also be said to start with Jesus' birth into the world when God's Kingdom can be said to have arrived - see Mark 3:27 where Jesus is likening himself to the one who binds and robs the strongman, Satan, and proves it by casting out evil spirits. It indicates that although this age is still a time of trouble (chapter 12) Satan is a defeated foe, awaiting final sentencing, and his power is severely limited. It is Jesus who now reigns.

¹⁶⁶ The deception of the nations is curtailed by the gospel being preached to them [Colossians 1:23]. Note that in Mark 13:10 the gospel is preached to the nations in contrast with only being preached to the Jews. It does not mean that every single person would necessarily hear it.

¹⁶⁷ Towards the end of this age it would appear that Satan will have one final fling. This is probably the period that Paul alludes to more straightforwardly in 2 Thessalonians 2:3ff and is paralleled in Rev 11:7 where the witnesses (the church) is persecuted. Whether we will be aware of the start of this period is uncertain. It may be an increasing time of evil, with many falling away from the faith? At any event, it will be a limited time. (Refer also to comments at 11:11.)

¹⁶⁸ Those who die as Christians are immediately raised to reign now with Christ in God's presence (thus they are designated priests). Because of this they escape the second death which is reserved for unbelievers who have rejected Christ and will remain in the grave until the Judgment Day which follows the second resurrection.

Notice that what can be said of those who have died as Christians can to a great measure also be said of Christians who are still alive. The new birth is like a resurrection and they too are thought of as priests reigning in this life with Christ (Rev 1:6).

¹⁶⁹ Gog and Magog are mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39. They are the enemy from the north coming against God's people. We do not need to identify them with a particular nation. They here represent the forces of evil against Christians.

¹⁷⁰ Earth and heaven (sky) have been so misused and morally polluted that they cannot stand the

dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (13) The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.¹⁷¹

(14) Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. (15) If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.¹⁷²

Revelation 21:1-27 **The New Jerusalem - God's People in His Presence.**

(1) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea [4:6, 15:2]. (2) I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.¹⁷³ (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (4) He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."¹⁷⁴

(5) He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

(6) He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End [1:8]. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.¹⁷⁵ (7) He who overcomes will inherit all this,¹⁷⁶ and I will be his God and he will be my son. (8) But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death." [2:11]

(9) One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last

holiness of God. They must flee.

¹⁷¹ This could be all the dead, but it may just be those who have rejected Jesus Christ and who are raised for the Judgment. The final judgment is made according to whether a person's name is found written in the Book of Life. There is also judgment according to deeds but those who plead their own deeds will find them quite inadequate. It is endurance in the faith which counts [3:5, 13:8, 17:8].

¹⁷² The Lake of Fire is the final and eternal punishment. Although it may not be fire as we know it, this should not lessen the horror and severity of it. Literal fire does at least consume and finish in ashes. This Lake never ends.

¹⁷³ This is the faithful of Old Testament Israel and the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, a holy city, the New Jerusalem, the place where God dwells, amongst His people.

¹⁷⁴ The old order of things (ie our present order) is under a curse (See Genesis 3). Paul comments that the whole creation is subject to frustration because of it [Romans 8:19]. The new order sees an end to sin and its consequences.

¹⁷⁵ See 7:17. Also Isaiah 55 and John 7:38 where the spring of water is seen to be the Holy Spirit. Compare this with Rev 22:1-2.

¹⁷⁶ See footnotes on 2:7

plagues¹⁷⁷ came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." (10) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.¹⁷⁸ (11) It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (12) It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. (13) There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. (14) The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

(15) The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.¹⁷⁹ (16) The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. (17) He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement,¹⁸⁰ which the angel was using. (18) The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. (19) The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone.¹⁸¹ The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, (20) the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. (21) The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

(22) I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple [3:12].¹⁸² (23) The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. (24) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. (25) On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. (26) The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it.¹⁸³ (27) Nothing impure will ever

¹⁷⁷ The angels with the bowls signalled the last of God's wrath [15:1]. Now one of them takes us into an eighth scene. Everything has ended with seven, the number of completion, so far, but by carrying over to eight we are, in a sense, starting afresh. A parallel to this is the resurrection of Jesus which comes not on the Sabbath, 7th day (Saturday) but the 'eighth' day, Sunday, the first day of a new week.

¹⁷⁸ The description of God's people (the holy city) is to demonstrate how they are prepared for Christ [v2]. They radiate God's glory, they are in the presence of God (thus the walls) and they bring to mind faithful Israel (12 tribes) and the teaching of Jesus through the apostles, whose names are on the walls' foundations (or perhaps buttresses).

¹⁷⁹ The measuring reminds us that nothing is overlooked. Everyone is accounted for, and marked out.

¹⁸⁰ Man's measurement, tangible imagery, to picture spiritual truths. The wall is not for security since there is no threat any more. It suggests through 'Jasper' the presence of God [4:3] encompassing His People, the city. 12,000 stadia = approx 2400km. 144 cubits = approx 65m.

¹⁸¹ The foundation's precious stones correspond to the stones of the Zodiac in some Egyptian and Arabian monuments. However, John lists them in reverse order showing his rejection of Astrology.

¹⁸² As well as symbolising the presence of God the earthly Temple held those things which were holy, while outside were the ordinary, secular things. On that Day God will encompass everything and it will all be holy, given to Him. There will no longer be things set apart. God's presence will then encompass the splendour, glory and honour of the nations [vv 24-26].

¹⁸³ The fact that the nations are seen in the presence of God does not indicate that everyone will eventually be saved just because 'nation' is usually used of pagan powers in Revelation. Rather we see that people are redeemed from the nations [5:9 & 7:9] and it is they who will bring their deeds and achievements done in Christ's name to God. This is confirmed by v27

enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 22:1-21 **The River of Life and Jesus' Coming**

(1) Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (2) down the middle of the great street of the city.¹⁸⁴ On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.¹⁸⁵ (3) No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. (4) They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads [3:12, 14:1 etc]. (5) There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever [2:26].

(6) The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

(7) "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

(8) I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. (9) But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"¹⁸⁶

(10) Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (11) Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."¹⁸⁷

(12) "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done [11:18, 20:12]. (13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End [1:8].

(14) "Blessed are those who wash their robes [7:14], that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. (15) Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

(16) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches.

stating that nothing impure will enter: only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life [20:12].

¹⁸⁴ The river/water imagery flows throughout Scripture. Of particular interest in the prophets are Joel 3:18, Zechariah 14:8 and especially Ezekiel 47. Also note 21:6.

¹⁸⁵ The Tree of Life appeared in Genesis 2:9 and then 3:22-23. Because of Sin, humankind was cut off from eternal life. In heaven, however, there will be a 'New Eden'. The curse of Sin will be ended and those People of God from all nations finding healing in Jesus' death on the cross will indeed live forever, reigning with Him. Whereas Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden and the full blessings of God, on that day God will be in the midst of His People (the city).

¹⁸⁶ See 19:10. The repeat of this angel-worship emphasises how easy it is to fall into idolatry and worship the created rather than the Creator. It serves as a strong warning.

¹⁸⁷ Once this stage has been reached it is too late for changes and decisions. The Judgment has come and there are no more chances.

I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star [3:7, 2:28]."

(17) The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life [21:6 22:1-2].

(18) I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. (19) And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

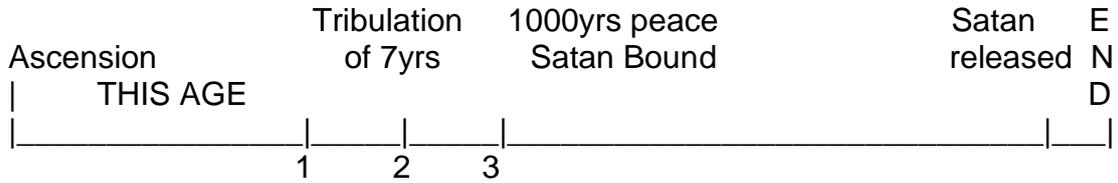
(20) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

(21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.¹⁸⁸ Amen.

¹⁸⁸ God's grace, His unmerited free gift, is fulfilled in this final description of heaven. It is John's desire that every Christian should endure and enter into those promises

THREE VIEWS OF THE MILLENIUM (1000yrs) of REVELATION 20

PREMILLENNIALISM - Jesus comes before the Millennium



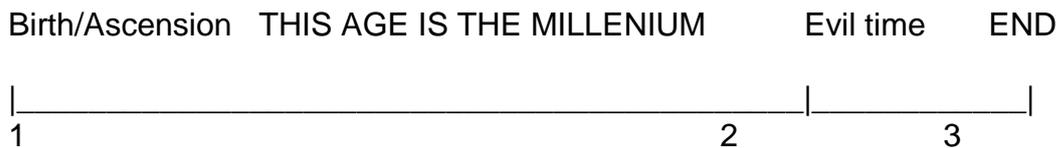
Jesus may return at 1, 2, or 3 to catch Christians up to meet him in the air. This is known as the Rapture. He establishes his reign and rules with Christians for the 1000years at 3. The Judgement is at the END. PREMILLENNIALISM tends to take descriptions and numbers at face value instead of symbolically (ie a literal 1000yrs and a literal rule over the inhabitants of the earth. It sees the chapters of Revelation as being in time sequence. The Millennium is not seen in the gospels but is additional teaching to them. It is a futurist view and tends to have less practical application to present Christian living (or to the original readers). It is also a majority view amongst evangelicals.

POSTMILLENNIALISM - Jesus comes after the Millennium



POSTMILLENNIALISM teaches that a period of good will emerge towards the end of this age (popular idea when the great missionary movements were at their peak - Less popular when world wars came along and a decrease in church attendance.) Some believe in a period of evil (1) just prior to Christ's second coming (2). Tends to play down a period of tribulation. Not a widely held view today.

A-MILLENNIALISM (Literally: Without a Millennium)



Jesus' birth, death, resurrection and ascension herald the end of Satan's deception and the start of Christ's reign. Those who die as Christians will also reign with him, NOW. Christians, although victorious in Christ spiritually, still suffer persecution, so this age is also one of tribulation. Towards the end Satan will have one 'last fling' (2) before Christ's second coming (3) and the judgement.

FOUR MAJOR APPROACHES TO THE INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

The Futurist tends to see everything from chapter four onwards as taking place just prior to Christ's return. It is a view often connected with Premillennialism and looks for fulfilment in current global trends.

The Historicist sees in Revelation the unfolding of history from the time of John's writing to the end of the world. A frequent feature of this approach has been to believe that the Pope, and revived Roman power is the antichrist.

The Preterist believes that the prophecies of Revelation have already taken place, but some still see the last few chapters as looking to the end of the world.

The Spiritual Approach sees much of Revelation occurring in the spiritual realm, between Satan and the angels. Where the symbolism does connect with the physical world, it is in recurring cycles of events.

Interpreters tend to major on one approach, but dip into the others at certain points.

COMMENTARIES ON REVELATION

"Apocalypse Now and Then" by Paul Barnett is a good introduction to Revelation. It is easy to read and gives a good overall view.

"Essential Vision" by Michael Wilcock is a cheaper reprint of the Revelation commentary from the Bible Speaks Today Series. It is easy to read, clearly explained and has some very interesting insights.

"Gospel in Revelation" by Graeme Goldsworthy is not a commentary but emphasises the gospel theme, which in turn helps to clarify the overall message.

"The Revelation of St John the Divine" by G.B. Caird is more technical but also helps to throw light on some obscure passages. He appears to believe however that everyone will be saved in the end (Universalism) but, to my mind, without sufficient justification from the text of the Bible.

"Revelation" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary Vol 12, is another more technical commentary which is helpful at points.

"Revelation, Four Views. A Parallel Commentary" ed. Steve Gregg is a very useful comparison of four approaches to the interpretation of the letter, laid out side by side.

A Summary of the Letters to the Seven Churches.

| | Ephesus | Smyrna | Pergamum | Thyatira | Sardis | Philadelphia | Laodicea |
|---------|---|--|--|--|---|---|--|
| JESUS | Holds 7 stars & walks among 7 lampstands. | Alpha & Omega. First and Last who died and came to life again. | Has the sharp double edged sword. | Eyes are like blazing fire. Feet like burnished bronze | Holds the 7 spirits of God & 7 stars. | Him who is holy and true. Holds the key of David | The Amen. The Faithful and true witness. Ruler of God's creation |
| PRAISE | Perseverance Test imposters. Not grown weary. Hate Nicolaitans. | Materially poor but spiritually rich. | Remain true to Jesus' Name. Did not renounce their faith. | For their love, faith, service, perseverance. Doing more than they did at first. | --- | They have kept Jesus' word and not denied his Name. Endured patiently. | --- |
| BLAME | Forsaken first love. | --- | Some hold the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. | They tolerate "Jezebel" -sexual immorality -food offered to idols. | They are dead & asleep. Their deeds are incomplete | --- | Neither cold nor hot. Wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, naked. |
| THREAT | Removal of lampstand. | --- | Jesus will fight against them with the sword of his mouth. | A bed of suffering for her and those who follow her. Her children to be struck dead. Repaid as to deeds. | Jesus will come like a thief. | --- | Will spit them out. |
| E. LIFE | Right to eat of the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God. | Crown of Life Not hurt by the 2 nd Death. | Hidden Manna. A white stone with a new name written on it. | Given authority over the nations. The morning star. | Walk with Jesus dressed in white. Name not erased from the Book of Life. Will be acknowledged before God. | Kept from the hour of trial. Be made a pillar in the Temple of God. Have the name of God/Jerusalem & Jesus' new name. | The right to sit with Jesus on his throne. |

AN OUTLINE OF REVELATION

| 1 Jesus The first and last > | 2-3 Messages to The 7 churches > | 4 God's Throne > | 5 The Lamb And the Scroll |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">6:1 – 8:1 SEVEN SEALS (Judgements on Every age One quarter Destroyed.)</p> <p>1.White horse Conquers</p> <p>2.Red horse Of war</p> <p>3.Black horse Of want</p> <p>4.Pale horse Of death</p> <p>5.Saints preserved</p> <p>6.Day of wrath Earthquake etc 144,000 kept</p> <p>7.Silence</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">8:2-11:19 TRUMPETS (increased Judgements One third Destroyed)</p> <p>1.Hail & Fire Earth burned</p> <p>2.Sea to blood</p> <p>3.Fresh water bitter</p> <p>4. Sun, moon, stars Darkened</p> <p>5."Star tortures those w/out God's mark</p> <p>6.Four angels Three plagues Fire, smoke, sulphur Scroll of witness Two witnesses</p> <p>7.Kingdom of the world has become the Lord's Kingdom</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">12-13</p> <p>Persecution of The church (woman)</p> <p>War in Heaven Satan/dragon hurled to earth. Seeks to make war on God's people and uses the Beast & another beast to do so.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">14</p> <p>144,000 redeemed Warnings against worshipping the Beast.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">15</p> <p>Vision of those who endured</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">16 BOWLS (Last plagues completing God's wrath. Complete destruction)</p> <p>1.Sores</p> <p>2.Sea to blood</p> <p>3.Fresh Water to blood</p> <p>4.Sun scorches</p> <p>5.Darkness</p> <p>6.Euphrates dries Gathering to Armageddon</p> <p>7. It is done 17-18 Judgement on "Babylon". 19:1-10 Praise for God's justice. 19:11-21 Jesus on white horse. Beast and false prophet burned.</p> |

20 SATAN
 Bound 1000yrs
 Set free short time
 Deceives nations
 Gather for battle
 v God's own.
 Defeated & burned.

20 GOD'S PEOPLE
 Came to life
 Reigned 1000yrs
 2nd death not affect them
 Rest of dead raised after
 1000yrs for Judgement Day

21-22 GOD'S PEOPLE
 New heaven and earth
 New Jerusalem
 Bride of the Lamb
 River of Life
 Tree of Life

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PART 1 JESUS AND THE MESSAGE TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES Chapters 1-3

From Chapter 1 Determine...

- a) The real author of the book v1, 4-5
- b) The content of the book v2
- c) The purpose of the book v11
- d) John's situation v9
- e) The description of Jesus as compared with that of God

Discuss:-

What do you learn from this comparison?

What does the chapter teach about the Trinity?

How do the things we endure, compare with John's day?

How is the description of Jesus both frightening and encouraging?

Bearing in mind that these chapters are written primarily to churches rather than individuals discuss from chapters 2-3, and the summary...

Which church would you most... and least want to belong to?

Which church do you most identify with?

When in church life have you seen these characteristics worthy of praise

and those worthy of condemnation?

What are the threats?

Have you seen these things happen to churches?

What are the promises?

Re-read Overview two

PART 2: Worthy is God and the Lamb 4-5

What reinforces the picture of power in chapter 4?

Why is God worthy of praise?

In the light of chapters 2-3,
what effect might such a vision have had on the seven churches?

What effect does it have on you? Can you say why?

Briefly determine:-

What does the scroll represent?

(This will become clearer as the seals are opened in subsequent chapters)

How is Jesus described in this chapter?

What is the significance of the terms
“Lion”
and “Lamb”

What has he achieved which makes him
worthy to open the scroll?

What sort of confidence can we derive from
this description?

How much does your church worship reflect that of heaven?

PART 3 TWO OF THREE CYCLES OF PLAGUES Chapters 6-9

**Re-read Overview three
and refer to the outline page.**

From Chapter 6 discuss...

How much do we see aspects of the disasters brought by the four horsemen (verses 1-7) in world history and in our world today?

In the midst of disaster Christians also suffer and lose their lives for their Faith. What happens to them according to verses 9-11 (5th seal) ?

What do these verses teach us about avenging ourselves?

In verses 12-17 (6th seal) we seem to have an account of God's judgement finally arriving. (Compare with Matthew 24:29-30 and Amos 8:9-13).

From Chapter 7 discuss...

Who are the 144,000?

What do they say?

What is their future?

Can *you* identify with them?

What is the "great tribulation" (verse 14)?

What do you think it would have meant to the seven churches?
(refer also to the Three views of the Millenium at the end of the booklet)

What tribulations have Christians faced through the ages?

What encouragement is given to Christians who persevere?

From Chapter 8:1-5 discuss...

The significance of the silence in heaven.

The possible content of the prayers of the saints (verse 3ff)

From Chapter 8:6 to 9:21

(The Plagues associated with the first six Trumpets)

[Note: The plagues are described in an “apocalyptic” highly stylised way, making it difficult to know whether they refer to particular events or disaster, war, disease and death in general.]

Some believe these plagues are all in the future, others that they have occurred through history, (perhaps with increasing magnitude).

What do you think?

Why does God allow these things to happen according to 9:20-21?

Re-read overview four

PART 4 WITNESS & PERSECUTION
Chapters 10-12 (Also Chapters 17-18)

Chapter 10

What is this mystery?

What is the content of the little scroll?

Why is it both sweet and bitter?

How do you relate to this personally?
What is your own experience of witnessing?

Chapter 11

Discuss what Sodom, Egypt, Babylon and Rome have in common in the history of God's people? (Refer also to chapters 17-18)

What were the characteristics of these dominant world powers?

What might correspond to those names today?

Make a list of some biblical characters who suffered in the course of witnessing for God and Jesus?

Do you know of any contemporary examples you can share with the group?

What is the assurance to these martyrs of the faith?

Chapters 12-15

[Note: The woman appears to be the People of God, not just Mary, mother of Jesus. Satan seeks to destroy God's plans by attacking his people.]

How do you see Satan attacking the church today?

What assurances does the witnessing church have in the face of Satan's onslaughts?

How is the gospel played out in this description?

How does Satan work through leaders of nations today? (Chapter 13)

How are the People of God described in chapter 14?

Is this or will it be, you?

What could deflect the People of God from following the Lamb, what would be the results?

What are the rewards here for "faithful endurance"? (Chapters 14:13-14 & chapter 15)

PART 5 JUDGEMENT

Chapter 16

The third and final cycle of Plagues. The seven Bowls.

Compare these plagues to the plagues of Egypt in Exodus.

What are the parallels between those events and these?

What is the purpose of these plagues?

Chapter 17

Why is evil unable to defeat Jesus and his followers? Verse 14

How does evil bring destruction on it's own in the world today? See verses 15-16.

Chapter 18

What is the destiny of "Babylon"?

In what way are Christians to "come out of Babylon" (verse 4)? And why?

From what do we need to separate ourselves?

Chapter 19

What are the reasons for the rejoicing of the great multitude?

Do these revelations cause you to rejoice?
(Share your reasons)

How is Jesus described in this chapter?

What is the fate of the “Beast” (refer to chapter 13) and the “False Prophet” (16:13)?

Chapter 20

What do you think it means when it refers to Satan being bound for one thousand years?

What do you think the “millennium” is (verses 1-8)?
(Refer to the back of *Revelation Text with Notes* for three views of the millennium).

What is the fate of the devil?

How does this description contrast with the popular notion that the devil is in control of hell?

What is the fate of death and Hades?
[Note: Hades is the place of the dead. It appears to be a waiting place and verses 4-6 suggest that it is those who have rejected Christ who occupy it.]

The fate of those not found in the book of life?

How should we respond to this knowledge?

Re-read overview five.

PART 6 HEAVEN

Chapter 21

[Note: The Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb is the People of God.]

How is the city described?

Can you identify with the description and if so how does it feel to be described this way?

What will the city's relationship be with God and Jesus on that day?

Chapter 22

Compare and contrast this description in verses 1-5 with Genesis 1-3.

What encouragements and warnings do you find in verses 6-21?

What do you see as the key verse in these verses?

Share your overall impression of Revelation now?

What has spoken to you most from your understanding of it?

Is there anything in your life which you now want to change as a result of reading it?

What questions do you still have?