

NINE KEYS TO UNLOCKING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Dr Barry Chant



Tabor Publications
Minds to understand; hearts to believe



Redeemer Baptist Church
A Fellowship of Renewal

NINE KEYS TO UNLOCKING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

A graphic, inspiring, uncomplicated approach to one of the Bible's most awesome books

Note: these notes are based primarily on the English Standard Version of the Bible.

By early Sep 2021, worldwide there had been 222 million cases of Covid 19 with 4.5 million deaths; there were 65 thousand cases in Australia, with over one thousand deaths. Not to mention earthquakes, bushfires, cyclones, floods.

Business closed, hospitals crammed, more suicides, unemployment, bankruptcy, escalating mental health especially among young people—and widespread apprehension and fear. Many were asking, Where is God? Why doesn't he do something? Is this what the book of Revelation is talking about? Are these the plagues and disasters described there?

In these videos we will uncover some keys to unwrapping Revelation's secrets. We will address some of these questions. By the time we have finished, you will read the book with fresh eyes. You will gain new insights and renewed encouragement.

There are many views of Revelation held by good and godly people. This is part of the genius of the book: it always seems relevant. On the other hand, the book does contain mysteries (1:20; 10:7; 17:7) and we need to be tolerant of each other's views and learn from each other's insights. There have been 'many discordant, wild and fantastic theories' yet the Apocalypse is 'surpassingly sublime' (Barnes).

In the area of eschatology (the study of last things, from *eschatos* = "last") there are plenty of examples. Consider the "Five Foolish Feologists and the dove".

A Threefold Blessing

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near (1:3).

Threefold action: read aloud, hear, keep the words.

Revelation is best appreciated when read aloud. In fact, just listening to it is a thrilling experience. This is an astonishing piece of literature that, if you give it time, it will enthrall you and engage you in a dramatic fashion. When listening, focus on the overall message, not the minutiae. Listen to it often! (I recommend the dramatised audio rendition from the New Revised Standard Version on <https://bible.is>. It's outstanding.) Also see the reading list for reliable commentaries. They do not all agree with each other but they all have valuable insights.

General Approaches

Generally, approaches to Revelation fall into one of the following categories.

Præterist: (from the Latin verb *præterire* = to pass by, to go by). A præterist approach takes the position that the events depicted were all contemporary for John and have already 'gone by'. So Babylon is Rome, the seven kings are seven Roman emperors, the number 666 refers to Nero and so on. Strength: it offers a strong starting point for study. Weakness: It makes the book largely irrelevant for subsequent generations.

Historicist: this is the view that Revelation offers a prophetic overview of history. So each of the seven churches represents a period in history, usually seen as culminating in the Laodicean age. Fundamental to the historicist view is the concept that one day represents a year. Strength: it makes Revelation relevant for every era. Weaknesses: historicism requires a working knowledge of

world history. Further, there is a trend to make the Laodicean church the current one, which means that as generations continue, the scheme has to be modified and updated.

Futurist (or dispensationalist): human history can be divided into dispensations, and Revelation basically deals only with the last one. Strength: once you believe we are in the last days, much of the Apocalypse can be seen to fit. Many exciting and/or frightening ideas emerge (e.g. 'left behind'). Weakness: futurism generally takes a literalistic view; numbers are taken at face value; exegesis is inconsistent, and tends to move in an arbitrary fashion between literal and metaphorical application.

Existentialist (commonly known as *Idealist*): That is, focused on human life and existence. It is presented in such a way that every human being of every age and place can identify with it. Further, it is the principles and themes that are important. Strength: the book is always relevant. Weakness: there is a danger that too much may be taken metaphorically.¹

¹ For a succinct summary of all four views see B. Chant and W. Pratney, *The Return*, Chichester: Sovereign World, 1988, 118–128.

1–NINE KEYS TO UNLOCKING REVELATION

You may ask, 'Why should I take your approach more than someone else's?' Well, in simple terms, each of the nine keys coming up now has actually been extracted from the book itself. This does seem a safe way to start ...

Key 1: It's All About Jesus

The Testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (19:10). The first and the last verses both testify to Jesus. He is frequently referred to as the Lamb (30 times) plus other identifiers such as the Son of Man (1:13; 2:18; 14:14), the One who is holy and true (3:7), the Lion of the tribe of Judah (5:5), the rider on a white horse (6:2; 19:19), the root and offspring of David (22:16). Then there is the major vision in chapter one (see further below).

It is a serious mistake to give more attention to the Dragon or the Monster, or the Prostitute or Babylon than to Jesus who eclipses them all.

Key 2: It's Spiritually Symbolic

- The language is *pneumatikos* (11:8) i.e. 'spiritual', of the Spirit. (On this word, see also Rom 12:1; 15:27; 1 Cor 2:13; 10:3–4; 12:1; 14:1; Eph 5:19; 1 Pet 2:2; 2:5).
- The revelation is 'sign-ified' (1:1; the Greek verb here is derived from the noun for sign.) Images are repeatedly expressed through 'signs' (Rev 1:1; 12:1; 12:3; 15:1).
- Some passages are obviously symbolic e.g. 1:12ff; 12:1ff; 13:1ff; others are explained (e.g. seven lampstands; seven stars; the sea).
- The meaning is often assumed and no explanation is given (e.g. sun; vineyard; harvest; harlotry; city; lamb; lion; woman; Babylon).
- Spiritually symbolic language also served as a code language because of fear of persecution by the Romans?
- OT prophets used spiritual symbolism (Num 12:6f; Hos 12:10; Ezekiel 1:1ff). Sometimes there is a mixture of symbolic and literal (c.f. Gen 40:9–23; 41:22–36).
- As in the language of prophecy, the revelations are commonly expressed through visions, dreams and riddles/parables (Num 12:6–8; Prov 1:6; Hos 12:10).
- As a result, there are incongruities such as a green rainbow (4:3), a monster with seven heads and one mouth (13:1–2), a Lamb with hands (5:7; 6:1), a Lion who is a Lamb (5:5–6); transparent jasper (21:11) and gold (21:18) etc
- Overall, there is so much *pneumatikos* language that we can claim that almost nothing is as it seems. Almost everything has a spiritual meaning. Clearly, every interpretation must be consistent with the rest of Scripture.

A note on literal interpretation

Generally, a fundamental rule of biblical hermeneutic is that the literal meaning should be our first option and that any other approach must be a last alternative. However, 'literal' does not mean 'literalistic'. A literalistic view takes every word at its plain meaning regardless. So this would mean that Jesus really was made of wood ('I am the door') or dough ('I am the bread of life') or road metal ('I am the way'). This is clearly absurd. A literal approach means taking the meaning of an expression in its overall context so that if it occurs in a parable or in a poem it may be that the metaphorical meaning IS the literal meaning. Hence, in Revelation, the Monster from the Sea, for example, cannot really have seven heads and ten horns—these all symbolise

something else. Nor are we intended to believe that the Mark of the Monster is an actual tattoo. And so on.

Key 3: It's Universally Applicable

The message of the book is for every tribe, language, nation and people i.e. for all people of all time. Seven times in Revelation.

- See 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15
- Universal in time (vertical)
- Universal in space (horizontal)
- Therefore always relevant

If our message cannot be preached everywhere, it should not be preached anywhere e.g. prosperity gospel. The gospel has always been for everyone regardless of colour or nationality. God loves the world.

e.g. One popular preacher in his book 1980 book *Warning* saw it all as being fulfilled (a) in Europe and (b) in the 20th Century. Eight out of ten predictions were wrong! In later years he modified his position on some areas.

Key 4: It's A Prophetic Book

Note the phrase 'this prophecy' (1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19)

It is inspired and authorised by the Holy Spirit (1:10, 11; 22:17)

The letters are spoken by Jesus and underwritten by the Holy Spirit (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). John regularly refers to being 'in the Spirit' (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).

Prophesying is a manifestation of the Spirit (Joel 2:28; 1 Cor 12:1–10; 14:1–30).

It uses prophetic language.

As we have seen, prophecy comprises visions, dreams and riddles/parables (Num 12:6–8; Prov 1:6; Hosea 10:12) that OT prophets did not themselves fully understand (1 Peter 1:10–12). Nevertheless, true prophecy has plain meaning (2 Peter 1:19–21), but this may only be revealed at the time of fulfilment. Examples of biblical riddles: Judges 14:14; Luke 23:31. One reason for such 'mystery' is that it avoids the possibility of self-fulfilment. Also be aware that the parables of Jesus, for example, often have only one or two major points and other details are simply like scaffolding (e.g. in the parable of the virgins, the bride is not even mentioned). This is also the case in the Apocalypse. On the other hand, biblical prophecies may have more than one application (e.g. Hosea 11:1 which clearly refers to the Exodus but which Matthew applies to the holy Family returning home from Egypt—Matt 2:15).

It's primary motivation is building hope (1 Cor 14:3)

In spite of the dramatic scenes of trial, wrath and judgement, the nature of biblical prophecy is essentially edification, encouragement and comfort i.e. **hope**. Compare the chilling sign at the entrance to hell in Dante's *Inferno*: 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here.'

e.g. Does Revelation predict a 'coming world ruler'? Yes. His name is Jesus.

Key 5: It's An Apocalyptic Book

It uses an apocalyptic framework. *Apokalupsis* = revelation, disclosure, manifestation, uncovering.

Other biblical books use poetic, narrative, epistolary etc, frameworks. Compare Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He makes no claim of divine inspiration, but he uses a vision/dream allegorical (parabolic) medium for his message:

From this world to that which is to come, delivered under the similitude of a dream ... As I walked through the wilderness of this world ... I laid me down in that place to sleep: and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream ... Now I saw in my dream ...

Apocalyptic writings were common in biblical times.

Jewish	Christian
Daniel	Apocalypse of Peter
Zechariah	Apocalypse of Paul
Apocalypse of Elijah	Apocalypse of Thomas
Apocalypse of Baruch	Apocalypse of the Virgin
Books of Enoch	Apocalypse of Stephen
Books of Jubilees	Apocalypse of James
Testament of the 12 Patriarchs	
The Assumption of Moses	
Apocalypse of Zephaniah	

However, many of these were pseudonymous and their content conflicted with the Scriptures. Examples: Baruch and Peter

Features of Apocalyptic Writings:

- Mystery
- Vision
- Symbolism
- Pseudonymity
- Eschatology
- Dualism
- Numerology
- Triumph of good over evil

John uses the apocalyptic medium but with some differences. There is no pseudonym; the Revelation took occurred at a specific place and time; John saw genuine visions. He notes that he was specifically instructed to write what he saw (1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5).

The NT Apocalypse alone stands in real relation to the life of the age in which it was written and attempts to reveal the meaning and issues of the events which the writer had witnessed or was able to foresee. The NT Apocalypse alone deserves the name or is, in any true sense, a prophecy² (Swete, 1907:xxii).

2 H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1907, xxiiw.

Key 6: It is Scripture-based

A working knowledge of the OT is beneficial in comprehending the meaning of the Apocalypse. There are over 300 references/allusions to the OT. For example, there are common references to or depiction of:

- Symbolic numbers (e.g. 3, 7, 12, 40, 144,000)
- Angels, cherubs, seraphs (Rev 4 and 5; Ezek 1)
- Strange beasts (Rev 13; Dan 8:1–14)
- Specific time-frames e.g. 42 months (Dan 7:25; 1 Kings 18:1ff; Jas 5:17)
- Two witnesses (Rev 11; Zech 4:11–14)

See also Ez 10:1ff; Rev 4:1ff; Ez 28:36; 9:3; Rev 7:1ff; Gen 35:23–26; Rev 7:4–9.

Barclay writes: In almost every passage we shall have to note John is consistent in his use of the Old Testament. He was so soaked in it that it was almost impossible for him to write a paragraph without quoting it.³

Key 7: It's Multi-Layered

Visions are not necessarily chronological. Although a chronological approach sits well with a Western mindset, it is not necessarily correct. Successive visions are commonly repetitious and complete in themselves. Successive chapters may express similar subjects from a different approach. For example, chapters 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13 each more or less cover the same time-frame and depict varying views of what happens in a fallen world.

Each vision may apply to more than one situation (e.g. tyranny of the Monster)

Compare OT prophecies—Isaiah chapters 11, 13, 19; Hosea chapters 2 and 3.

Key 8: It's Thematic

The order of visions can be seen as thematic rather than chronological. The following themes are all central and clearly important to the overall message. They are all striking and vivid.

- Worship (4:8–11; 5:8–14; 7:9–12; 19:1–8; 22:9)
- Victory (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5; 5:5–13; ; 12:11; 19:11–21)
- Justice (6:9–11; chs 21 and 22)
- Judgement (18:6–21)
- Patient endurance (1:9; 2:3, 10, 13, 19; 3:8, 10; 6:9–11; 7:14; 12:10; 13:10b; 14:12; 18:4; 20:4)
- The kingdom of God (1:6, 9; 5:10; 11:15; 12:10)
- Encouragement (1:3; 22:1–5)
- Hope (chaps 21, 22)

Key 9: It Affirms God's Sovereign Purpose

The Lord almighty reigns! (19:6). Numerous commands are given by angels. God's sovereignty is implied by phrases like 'it was given', 'was permitted'. Remarkably, even evil deeds are regularly depicted as happening only when allowed by God. See 6:2, 4, 8, 11; 8:2, 3; 9:1, 4, 5; 12:14; 13:5, 7, 15;

³ W. Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: the Revelation of John*, Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1985, 35.

17:12. It also suggests, perhaps, that God is allowing things to take their natural course without direct intervention on his part.

While this raises issues about theodicy (i.e. the integrity of a righteous God in a wicked world), it nevertheless reassures us that God has never abandoned us and that at the end of the day, his divine purpose is unshaken. In this we place our hope.

Summary

1. Jesus is the beginning and the end (both of the book and of history); the first and the last; the alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:1; 1:12–20; 22:13; 22:21). The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy (19:10);
2. Those who read and observe receive special blessing (Rev 1:3)
3. The challenge to readers and hearers is to listen closely to the voice of the Spirit and to follow the Lamb wherever he goes! (Rev 14:4)

Kneel—task at the end of each study:

In 25 words or so, write down one important principle or idea from this section that you can apply to your own life or circumstances.

2–THE TRIUMPH OF THE KEYHOLDER

Read Revelation 1:1–20

A Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,
As we come to your Word today, please give us sharp minds to understand and soft hearts to believe. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Introduction

In the original Greek text of the book, the very first word is *apokalupsis*. It means disclosure, unveiling, revelation, and is used in the NT of God's revealing of his Word and purpose in the gospel itself (Lk 2:32; Rom 16:25; Gal 1:12; 2:2; Eph 3:3); of the personal source of a prophecy (1 Cor 14:6, 26, 30); of ongoing life in the Spirit (Eph 1:17). It is appropriately used as the name of the book, embracing, as it does, all these features. (And hence the name Apocalypse.)

The original revelation was given to Jesus (the first three words in the original are (*apokalupsis Iesou Christou*), to show his slaves (*doulos*) what must take place soon. No doubt John saw this as meaning contemporary, but the word can also mean quickly, shortly or hastily or even suddenly. Præterists, Historicists and Futurists have all been able to accommodate it.

An angel was the first to reveal the vision to John foreshadowing the role angels would play throughout the book.

John unashamedly records that has borne witness (*martureo*) to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ (2). Clearly, he had not actually been martyred but he was apparently suffering nevertheless, as an exile on Patmos.

The Seven Churches (4)

See the map for their location. No reason is given for choosing just these seven of the many who could have been included (e.g., Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Colosse etc). Perhaps they were each representative of various possible conditions or states of churches.

The Greeting (4b–8))

- Grace (*charis* = underserved favour) and peace (*eirene* = reconciliation with God)
- Who is ...: God the Father, eternal and sovereign (Ex 3:14)
- Seven spirits: a strange but obvious reference to the Holy Spirit
- Jesus Christ: linked here with the Father and the Spirit as elsewhere in the book, a clear expression of trinitarian understanding
- Faithful witness (5) = Jesus (19:11; 22:6)
- Firstborn from the dead (5) = the resurrection which identified Jesus as the Son of God (Rom 1:4)
- Ruler (archon) of the kings of earth = King of Kings
- Loves us (5): the supreme attribute of Christ (John 13:34, 35; 1 John 3:16)
- Freed us from our sins by his blood (5). To free is *luo*, not *lavo* (wash). Note that the concept being washed in blood is probably neither Hebraic nor biblical. See on 7:14.
- Kingdom and priests (6): two-fold ministry (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 5:10 compare Zech chs 3 and 4). See also the Lion and the Lamb (5: 5, 6).
- Glory and dominion (6): these are rightfully his.

- Forever and ever (6): literally 'into the ages of the ages'. Compare Rev 20:10.
- Amen: so be it, verily, truly, most certainly.
- With clouds: see Psalm 18:8–14; Dan 7:13; Matt 24:30; 1 Thess 4:17.
- Every eye including those who crucified him (Zech. 12:10–14). Even the dead will be awakened.
- Weep: Universal distress and terror (2 Thess. 1:7)
- Even so (7): This sounds harsh, but John is simply glad to see justice done.
- Alpha and Omega (8): God's immortality is again stressed, as it is with the use of the same phrase at the end of the book (this time in reference to Jesus, 22:13). These are like bookends to ensure us that no matter what tragedies occur in the centre of the story, the beginning and the end are firmly in God's hands. When listening or reading further we must not forget this introduction.



Patmos and the seven churches of Asia Minor

The Writer (9–11)

- Your brother (*adelphos*) and partner (*sugkoinonos*, a strong term that means not just partner but partner-together) in the tribulation (9): This is the first of several references in the book to portray the tribulation as much longer than (for example) seven years. They are also brothers and partners in the kingdom and in patient endurance (which also relates to tribulation).
- Patmos (9): probably a place of banishment and hard labour, where John is located because of his faithful witness.
- In the Spirit. See also 4:2; 17:3; 21:10: This phrase indicates an awareness of the presence of God; communing with God in a supra-rational way; praying with the spirit; sensitive to revelation. Compare being 'in the open air' or 'in the pool'.
- On the Lord's Day: no doubt Sunday (Ps 118:322–24). See also Patristic writings such as the Didache, Ignatius, Tertullian.

- A loud voice (10). Phrases like 'still, small voice' have been popularised because of the common understanding of reverence being marked by quietness. Here God shouts! It's like the sound of a trumpet, spine-chilling! Compare Heb 5:7 where 'loud cries' and 'reverence' go together.
- Write: John claims divine revelation in what he writes (11).

The Seven Churches (Rev 1:20)

- Lights in the world
- Christ is central to local churches, moving among them in power and glory
- Jesus sends each local church a unique message, Not one menorah—separate lampstands
- Not denominations

The Son of Man (13)

- Prophetic description of the Messiah (Daniel 7:13–14).
- The title often used by Jesus (Matt 16:13; Luke 19:10; John 13:31)

The long robe

- Holiness
- Priesthood (Exodus 28:4; Ezra 9:2)
- Jesus is our great eternal High Priest (Heb 7:24–28)

White hair

- Wisdom
- Proverbs 16:31; 20:29.
- Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:30)
- That wisdom was demonstrated through the cross (1 Cor 1:34–24)

Eyes like blazing fire

- Prophetic insight ('seer') 1 Sam 9:9; Amos 7:12. Jesus knows all about us.

Feet like burnished bronze

- Authority (Psalm 90:31; Luke 10:19)
- God has put all things under the feet of Jesus (Ephesians 1:19–23)

Voice like rushing waters

- Power (Isaiah 66:2; Ezek 43:2)
- With a word, Jesus was able to calm storms, multiply food, heal the sick, raise the dead (e.g., Mark 4:39)
- His followers hear his voice (John 10:27)
- All those in the grave will hear his voice (John 5:25)

Sharp double-edged sword

- The word of God (Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12)
- When Jesus speaks, he speaks the sharp and powerful Word of God.
- See also Rev 2:12,16; 19:15

Seven stars

- Angels, or messengers (leaders, pastors) of the seven churches

In Jesus' right hand

- Safety (c.f. John 10:28)
- Guidance (Ps 139:10)

Face shining like the sun in full strength

- Christ's unmodified glory is more than human eye can stand (Matthew 17:2; Psalm 84:11)
- When we see his glory, we are overwhelmed (c.f. Isaiah 6:5; John 12:41)
- God's glory is seen in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6)

In the midst of the lampstands—Here today, Jesus is in our midst

- His presence is among us to heal, restore, save and bless
- His Word is powerful to penetrate the hardest rock
- He is alive today to meet every need

Christ spans all eternity

- 'I am'—similar to the phrase used of God (Exodus 3:14)
- God is also called the first and the last (Rev 1:8; Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 46:10–11; 48:12)
- Either blasphemy or deity

Living ... dead ... alive

- The Easter message
- The resurrection is the ultimate proof of Christ's deity (Romans 1:4)
- No resurrection ... no faith (1 Cor 15:14–17)

The keys of death and Hades

- Jesus determines who enters and who exits
- Hades = place of the dead
- Our destiny is in his hands
- Calvary proves the reality of the wrath of God
- He is alive!
- He is above all things
- Let's worship him afresh today

The Son of Man

- He is the faithful witness,
- The firstborn of the dead,
- The ruler of kings on earth.
- He is the one who loves us
- He has freed us from our sins by his blood.
- He is clothed with a long robe
- He has a golden sash around his chest
- His hair is white like wool, as white as snow.
- His eyes are like a flame of fire
- His feet like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace
- His voice is like the roar of many waters
- In his right hand he holds seven stars
- From his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword

- His face is like the sun shining in full strength.
- He is the first and the last
- He is the living one.
- He has the keys of Death and Hades.
- He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

3—A WORLD OF WORSHIP & The Lion and The Lamb

A Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as we come to your Word today, please give us sharp minds to understand and soft hearts to believe. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Read Revelation 4:1–11

A WORLD OF WORSHIP

This passage sets our bearings. The whole picture is of glory, colour, splendour, majesty. The central focus is the throne: the sovereignty of God.

- 'In the Spirit' = spiritual dimension (compare air, water)
- The throne = seat of government. The word occurs 46x in Revelation.
- Jasper and carnelian = life and blood ('Christmas colours')
- Rainbow = emerald. An oxymoron, but = life. Complete circle?
- Elders = 2 x 12; rulers
- Represent God's people (12 for OT; 12 for NT?)
- White = purity, righteousness
- Golden crowns = glory both dignity and victory
- Lightning/thunder = power and awe
- Sea of glass. See also 15:2. No waves: calm and clear. 'A tideless sea' (From the song 'The Holy City' by Frederick E. Weatherly, 1892).
- Around the throne. Centred on God. Notice the present tense.
- Eyes = insight, knowledge
- Lion = regality, power (wildlife)
- Ox = strength, servitude (domestic life)
- Man = wisdom, language
- Eagle = authority, soaring, heights ('in flight')
- 'Day and night'—metaphorical.
- Divine attributes—eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immortality, glory and honour—already His yet attributed to Him.
- Cast crowns—submission, allegiance
- Worthy = deserving
- Because of creation: it is significant how creation is mentioned in worshipping God (see also 10:6) in the light of contemporary dismissal of this concept, a deception that has affected almost everyone. Let's join in such worship!

THE LION AND THE LAMB

Read Revelation 5:1–14

The Scroll

- No one could even look into it = the divine purposes of God. See 6:1 to 8:5. John 'began to weep' (imperfect tense) loudly over this.
- Seven seals—see chapters 6 to 8.
- The scroll is in God's right hand = divine purpose
- Writing front and back i.e., Full! Unusual for papyrus. But see Ezek 2:9,10.
- Seven seals—like a Roman will. Obviously important. C.f. Neh 9:38; Dan 12:4.

The Lion

- Lion = strength and majesty (Prov 19:12; 28:1; 30:30; Ez 19:2–3)
- From Judah (Gen 49:8–10; Micah 5:2)
- The root (i.e., descendant) of David—but also the source
- Conquered in order to open the scroll = through the resurrection.

The Lamb

- John looks for the Lion but what he sees is a Lamb!
- Lamb = lowliness and sacrifice
- Greek *arnion* (used 29 times in Rev but otherwise only in John 21:15)
- In Jesus we see both Lion and Lamb, King and Priest, Sovereign and Saviour, Lord and Servant, Crown and Cross.
- Both are needed for godly ministry.
- As though it had been slain (*sphradzo* = slaughter). See John 1:29; Heb 7:27; 9:23–28.
- Seven horns = strength (Ps 18:2; 89:17; 89:24; 92:10; 132:17; Matt 28:18)
- Later imitated by dragon and beast
- The throne: the Lamb is central
- Seven horns = strength (Ps 18:2; 89:17; 89:24; 92:10; 132:17; Matt 28:18)
- Seven eyes = Spirit of God
- Worship, praise and prayer
- Took the scroll = authority
- Fell down i.e., worshiped
- Before the Lamb. The Lordship of Christ.
- Prayers of the saints; They do reach God (8)
- Harp = praise; bowls = prayers. (Different bowls in chapter 16.)

A New Song

- A new song—because of a new event, redemption through the blood (sacrifice) of Christ (Ps 37:3; 40:3; 96:1). The word is *kainos* i.e., new in quality, fresh, rather than *neos*, recent.
- Saying—implies singing (see verse 9)
- Christ is worthy because of the cross.
- Ransom = redeem, buy back (Eph 1:7)
- Every tribe, language, people and nation. Everyone, of every place and time.
- Kingdom and priests. Jesus is High King and High Priest, and we reflect that. Ex 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9. See also re chapter 11.
- Reign. His Kingdom will prevail.

A Crescendo of Worship

- Angels: of every kind! (v11)
- Myriad = ten thousand or more i.e., billions
- Thousands of thousands i.e., millions
- Loud voice: vocal prayer and praise is ubiquitous in Scripture. 20 to one?
- Power (*dunamis*), Wealth (*plouton*), Wisdom (*sophia*), Might (*ischus*), Honour (*timí*), Glory (*doxa*), Blessing (*eulogia*)
- All of nature combined to worship
- Both God and the Father
- Amen = so be it!
- Elders and living beings fall and worship: they conclude the praise as they began it.

4–THE SECRETS OF THE SEVEN SEALS

A Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,
As we come to your Word today, please give us sharp minds to understand and soft hearts to believe. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Read Revelation 6:1–17

The Sacred Scroll (2)

- The scroll opened by the Lamb (5:1–14) is symbolic of God's purpose for humankind
- It is secret and secured
- Like the rest of the Apocalypse, it is for every tribe, language, nation and people

The Four Horsemen

The four horses represent the kinds of things that happen repeatedly in our world throughout history.

The red horse (6:3–4)

- Red = bloodshed
- Slay = social violence
- Sword = slaughter
- No peace = war
- The red horse depicts war and conflict

The black horse (6:5–6)

- Scales = measure
- Quart = approx. one litre
- Denarius = a coin (roughly a day's wages)
- The black horse = famine, malnutrition, poverty.

The pale horse (6:7–8)

- Pale = death-like, pale green, gangrenous
- Hades = place of the dead
- To kill with the sword = war, famine, pestilence (pandemic), nature
- The pale horse = disease, injury, death.

The white horse (6:1–2)

Given that three of the horses are symbols of trouble, it would seem logical to see the white horse in the same way. But the description of the white horse does not fit this idea. If we see this chapter is describing the kind of things that happen throughout history, we simply have a picture of the age of grace as a period during which the gospel is proclaimed victoriously in the face of ongoing disaster.

These horses are not necessarily chronological—they are evidently contemporaneous. The rider on the white horse does not appear to represent Christ himself, as none of the other three represent individuals.

- White horse = a movement or series of events that do conquer and will conquer.
- White = righteousness
- Bow = weapon
- Crown = deity

- Rider = the gospel
- No matter what happens through history, the gospel continues to triumph.

This is the hope we have—that in the world we face trouble, but that Christ has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Under The Altar (6:9–11)

The altar = altar of sacrifice in the tabernacle/temple. (Morris argues for it being the altar of incense, but the altar of sacrifice seems to be more appropriate here.) These are they who have shared redemptively in the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor 4:7–18; Col 1:24).

- Slain: physical or spiritual? (2 Cor 4:10; Gal 2:20). If spiritual, they would include all who have been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20; Rom 6:3–4; 2 C or 4:10)
- Loud voice = passion, desperation
- Sovereign Lord = God is always in command
- Avenge: God's prerogative
- How long?: patience
- White Robe = righteousness, integrity
- A little longer = from heaven's perspective

The Mountains and the Rocks (6:15–16)

- Everything shaken
- Earthquake = only what cannot be shaken is secure (Heb 12:27–28)
- Stars = human authorities and powers (compare 1:20)
- Sun, moon, sky etc = everything is affected
- Powerful etc = no-one and nothing can stand (17)
- Mountains and rocks = the terror of facing God
- Wrath of the Lamb = apparent oxymoron, but the Lamb is also the Lion (ch.5)
- Note that in spite of terror there is no sign of repentance
- Our world is an unjust place. There must be a day of reckoning.

FOLLOWING THE LAMB

Read Revelation 7:1–8; 14:1–5

For a joyful, singable hymn based on this passage, see T. C. O'Kayne, 'Washed in the Blood of the Lamb'.

The Setting (7:1–3)

- **Peace on earth:** no damaging weather patterns (1–3). Symbolises the gospel of peace.
- **The seal** (3–4). Compare the mark of ownership of slaves; the cross (Ezek 9:4); holiness (Ezek 28:36–38); the name of the Father and of Jesus (Rev 14:1); the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 1:21); the Word of God (Deut 6:6–9).

The 144,000 (3)

There is much speculation about the identity of this group. Some believe that they are actual members of the tribes and mistakenly call them Jews (a name given in Scripture only to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) e.g., Jewish evangelists during the Tribulation. There are other fanciful theories. If we consider 7:1–4 as well, we can make the following identifiers.

- They are clearly called the servants (*doulos*, slave) of God (7:3).

- Such precise categorising is unnatural (families universally vary in size, numbers, appearance etc)
- If literal tribes, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all miss out.
- They constitute the redeemed (14:3)
- 144,000—perfection (3, 4, 12, 1000). Compare the thickness of the walls of the New Jerusalem (144 cubits, Rev 21:16).
- 3 = divine perfection—the Godhead
- 4 = four points of the compass
- 4 = four gospels
- 12 = tribes of Israel and/or twelve disciples. See also the twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve jewels, twelve foundations, twelve pearls and names of both the tribes and of the apostles (21:12–14). The city is also 12,000 stadia square.
- 1000 = completion (19x in Revelation)
- Dan and Ephraim are missing (7:4–8)
- They are only male (14:4)
- Perhaps these omissions and variations are deliberate in order to steer us away from seeing members of this group as the actual tribes. It is wiser to see them as spiritually symbolic of the whole people of God perfected in Christ

Read Revelation 7:9–17

The Great Multitude (9–10)

John *hears* the number 144,000 but he does not see them. What he *sees* is a countless multitude. It is clearly the same group.

- universal in origin (every tribe, language, nation and people)
- before the throne
- before the Lamb
- righteous (white)
- honouring the Lamb (palm branches)
- worshipping God and the Lamb with loud voices.

Sufficient details are given to identify these people as the whole people of God

They stand on Mount Zion, Jerusalem's stronghold, symbolic of the Church militant and triumphant (Psalm 2:6; 48:1–14; Isaiah 61:3; Heb 12:22; 1 Peter 2:6). They stand with the Lamb of God, Jesus (Rev 5:6) and in contrast to branded runaway slaves, they bear his name and his Father's name on their foreheads (Matthew 28:18–20; John 14:14; Mark 16:17–18). Compare Aaron (holiness, Ex 28:36–38), Hebrew houses (Scripture, Deut 6:8–9; 11:18) or Ezekiel 9:4 (the letter T, the sign of the cross). Compare 'Headbands' and 'wristbands' today.

There is a voice from heaven like many waters (power) or the sound of a harp (peace). This is an apparent incongruity; the sound is Indescribable.

They sing a new song of redemption, no doubt similar to that in chapter five.

- Christ is worthy
- He was slain (slaughtered)
- By his blood he ransomed (redeemed) us
- From every place and age
- A kingdom of priests
- To reign on earth

Angels around the throne (11–12) ascribe seven attributes to God.

- Blessing
- Glory
- Wisdom
- Thanksgiving
- Honour
- Power
- Might

(Compare 5:12: Power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory, blessing). Two seem out of place (why?)

The 144,000

When we combine the qualities of both groups (7:1–17 and 14:1–4) we see the following 20 attributes:

- Washed their robes
- Made them white in the blood of the Lamb
- Serve constantly in the temple (holy place)
- Sheltered by God
- No hunger, thirst, sunburn
- The lamb is their Shepherd
- God wipes away every tear
- Stand before the throne
- Have come through great tribulation
- Clothed in white robes holding palm branches
- The Lamb guides them to living springs
- Stand on Mount Zion
- Bear the names of Jesus and the Father
- They sing a new song
- Redeemed (redeem = buy back) through the blood of the Lamb (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Peter 1:18–19)
- Spiritually chaste with a spiritual virginity; pure; uncompromising (2 Cor 11:2; Lev 10:10; 21:13–15).
- They are devoted to God/faithful
- Harvest first-fruits (the first of the crop or flock/herd given to God, Lev 23:10–20; Romans 8:23; 2 Thess 2:13; James 1:18) in hope of more to come
- They speak the truth. Truth is non-negotiable (Is 53:9; Jn 8:32; 14:6; John 17:17; Eph 1:13; 4:25; Col 3:9)
- They are blameless (1 Peter 1:19; 1 Tim 3:1–7; Lev 10:10; Ezekiel 44:23) Not that it is impossible to sin, but it is possible not to sin. (Latin: not *nōn posse peccare* but *posse nōn peccare*).

Following The Lamb

Note that they follow the Lamb—not the Lion. The sword of God’s Word is his ‘weapon’. He is the suffering Saviour, the wounded Healer. His is the way of the Cross (1 Peter 2:21–24). See stories of martyrs such as Polycarp, Blandina, Michael Sattler, Anne Askew and contemporary missionaries. It is said that in October AD312, Constantine saw a vision of the cross with a message: ‘Conquer by this.’ He got it completely wrong. He thought it meant take up the sword in the name of the Cross. He wanted to be a lion, not a lamb. Compare Eusebius’s story of the martyr Vettius of whom he wrote, ‘He showed ... the fullness of his love, being well pleased even to lay down his life (for) the brethren. For he was and is a true disciple of Christ, following the Lamb whithersoever he goes’.

Our calling is to follow Jesus the Lamb of God wherever He goes!

The Tribulation (7:14)

Præterist view:

The great tribulation was the destruction of Jerusalem under the Romans (AD70). 'Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries ...' (Josephus).

Comment: There seems little doubt that the Monster, Babylon etc, depicted aspects of Rome. But the prophecies are so worded that they go well beyond Rome.

Historicist view:

The tribulation covers the gospel age.

Comment: Although the attempt to tie in historical events is untenable, the overall position is biblically justifiable (see below)

Futurist/dispensationalist view:

1. Jesus spoke of tribulation prior to end of age (Matt 24:21)
2. Daniel wrote of desolation (9:26–27)
3. We are to be delivered from the wrath to come (Matt 3:7; Rom 2:5; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9)
4. A pre-Tribulation rapture will remove believers from the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:36–44)
5. The reign of the Beast of 42 months (Rev 13) = second half of tribulation
6. Philadelphia church to be delivered from time of trial 'upon whole world' (Rev 3:10)

Comment:

1. Not one clear biblical statement can be found of a pre-tribulation rapture.
2. The tribulation of which Jesus spoke referred initially to the destruction of Jerusalem (see Josephus).
3. The meaning of Daniel's reference is unclear.
4. 'Wrath' (*orgé*) is God's judgement; tribulation (*thlipsis*) is suffering and trial. We are promised freedom from wrath, but not from trial, which we are told to expect (John 15:18–21; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 3:12).
5. John was part of 'the tribulation' (Rev 1:9) as is every believer (Rev 7:14ff). See also Jn 16:33; Rom 5:3; 12:12; 2 Cor 1:4; 7:4; 2 Thess 1:4.
6. The 42 months symbolise a time of trial (1 Kings 17 and 18; James 5:17; Rev 11:16)—it is not intended to be taken literally (30-day months) See also 2 Esdras 10:43.
7. The church at Smyrna was *not* delivered from tribulation (Rev 2:9, 10).
8. The context makes it clear that the people who are taken in the parable in Matt 24:36–44 are the wicked. It is the godly who are left. In the parable of the weeds and the wheat, the weeds are removed first (Matt 13:24–29).
9. Revelation's persistent message of patient endurance implies trial and trouble.
10. What of those in previous generations who have suffered and often died without being rescued or 'raptured'?
11. The futurist view can easily lead to an escapist mentality. Christians are called to be a light in the darkness and servants to the needy. This is a major issue.

The Universal Principle

'If you can't preach your messages everywhere, don't preach it anywhere!' The genuine gospel meets this principle.

5–SEVEN TRUMPETS, ONE SCROLL, TWO WITNESSES

Read Revelation 8:1–13; 9:1–21

The Prayers of all The Saints (8:3, 4)

Most commentators seem to agree that the relatively short period of silence is simply an interlude, a time to take a deep breath, as it were, before pressing on.

- The seven angels are apparently select angels, perhaps archangels.
- Trumpets (2): In OT times, the shophar was basically a ram's horn. There were also silver trumpets. They all had a limited and inaccurate tonal range. The shophar was used for almost any occasion. The silver trumpet was employed specifically to call the assembly together, to summon to war, to sound an alarm, to help celebrate holy festivals, and generally be a reminder that 'I am the LORD your God' (Num 10:1–10). The NT makes no distinction. The Greek word used in Rev 8 for 'trumpet' is identical with the term used for 'blowing your own trumpet' (Matt 6:2) and the last trumpet (Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16 etc). Here the meaning seems to be more that of sounding the alarm.
- The altar: Probably the altar of incense = the sacred nature of prayer.
- The golden censer. 'Much' incense = abundance.
- Smoke (4): symbolizes the prayers of all the saints. So here is a reminder to us that in spite of God's judgments being delivered, he still relishes the prayers of, not just the saints, but of ALL the saints, great or small, significant or insignificant, strong or weak.
- Fire (5). In the Bible, fire usually refers to judgement. Note that prayer and judgement are both fuelled from the same altar. Worth thinking about.

The First Two Trumpets (8:7–9)

How literally is this passage to be understood?

- Hail, fire, blood = cyclones? Or political, governmental chaos?
- Both land and sea = widespread.
- One-third: devastating (even green grass) but not totally = partial judgement
- Fearful for the wicked but not the godly (Ps 46:2).

The Third Trumpet (8:10–11)

- Star: a meteor? Symbolic of heavenly judgement?
- Wormwood: symbol of bitterness (Lam 3:15; Amos 5:7). Water symbolic of life?

The Fourth Trumpet (8:12)

- One third of stars: first land and sea and now sky. Physical, intellectual and spiritual darkness?
- An ('one') eagle: a dramatic warning: sign of God's patient grace (Acts 3:26; 17:30)

The Fifth Trumpet (9:1–11)

- Star: an Angel (c.f. 1:20)?
- Abyss (bottomless pit): dwelling place of spirits (Lk 8:31; Rev 11:7) out of which came smoke
- Locusts (see Ex 10:12; Joel 2:1–11)
- Was given (1, 3): God's permission

- The Scorpions: warning signs (3–6). Obviously metaphorical appearance. Crowns = leadership; horses = speed; human faces = intelligence; women’s hair = charm and beauty; lion = power’ breastplates = invincibility; noise of wings = generating fear; chariots = militancy; stings in tails = torture
- Limited scope to act (3, 4: ‘given power’, ‘were told’)
- Not to harm nature (4: grass, plant, trees)
- Not to harm those sealed (4: see 7:14)
- Restricted power to torment (‘five months’ = locust life-span)
- But causing excruciating pain (6) Not necessarily physical.
- Apollyon = Destroyer (Job 26:6; Ps 87:11; Pr 15:11). Another name for Satan. See Bunyan’s, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* for an exciting episode involving Christian’s fierce battle with Apollyon:

Then did Christian draw; for he saw it was time to bestir him; and Apollyon as fast made at him, throwing Darts as thick as hail; ... In this Combat no man can imagine, unless he had seen and heard as I did, what yelling and hideous roaring Apollyon made all the time of the fight: he spake like a Dragon ...⁴

The Sixth Trumpet (9:13–19)

This overall vision gives a fearsome picture of impending wrath. It is the collective impact of the troops and their wild horses that is important.

- Golden altar: the altar of incense/prayer
- The four angels: a specific group (perhaps evil angels—‘bound and released’)
- Euphrates: an ancient border beyond which lay enemies like the Parthians
- Date and time: God’s purpose is predestined and specific
- 200 million: a vast impossible number for a mortal army
- Colours: red, blue, yellow i.e., fire, smoke and sulphur
- The fearsome horses: Heads AND tails: not two–up
- One third of humankind: this is not the final judgement (20, see also 15)
- Works: demonolatry, idolatry, murder (= hatred, Matt 5:21–22), sorcery, sexual immorality (= lust, Matt 5:27–28), theft
- Did not repent: in trouble, people either repent or resent; either turn to God or against God; either better or bitter

The real point of this sixth trumpet is that again, humankind did not repent of their deeds, in spite of the terrible judgement.

Could this be true of today’s generation?

THE LITTLE SCROLL AND THE TWO WITNESSES

Read Revelation 10:1–11

The Mighty Angel

Once again, we have breathing space and our attention is drawn to one of God’s mighty angels.

- Sun, rainbow etc (1): The angel’s appearance reflects the glory of Jesus (1:12–16).
- Land and sea (2) = world-wide power.

⁴ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, London: Oxford University Press, 1960, 55–59.

- Little scroll (2) = the gospel.
- Open (2) the contents are for everyone (contrast 5:1–4).
- Voice like a lion (3): strong, fearful. Not to be ignored.
- The Seven Thunders: their message will never be known. An expression of God’s mercy? What if we did know the full extent of God’s judgement? How would we stand?
- ‘Have said’ (3, 4): meaningful message.
- Voice from heaven (4): Possibly God; greater authority than the angel.
- Message not to be recorded because of ‘no more delay’ (6)?
- Seal (4); again, contrast 5:1–4.
- Swore with upraised right hand (5–6): see Deut 32:40; Dan 12:7. The focus is on the omnipotent, creative power of God: it will be done!
- No more delay (6): a vision of final culmination.
- Mystery (7) = Secret. The once-hidden divine secret of the gospel is now revealed and is soon to be fulfilled. See Eph 1:3–10; 3:4–12.

The Little Scroll

The scroll (8–9) is freely given and John actively takes it and eats (devours) it. It is bitter-sweet (9–11). The message is delightful to consume (Jer 15:16; Ezek 3:1–3) but painful to absorb.

John is commanded again to prophesy (11), although technically this is the first time he has been so instructed. But there is a price to pay. While the gospel is good news, it is a sad thing when people reject its warnings. Further, in authentic Christian ministry, there is always sacrifice and suffering involved (2 Sam 24:24; Luke 14:26–27, 33; John 12:24–25) as every servant of God knows full well. The joy of tasting the Word (Jer 15:16) is paired with the pain of digesting the Word (Jer 20:9) and living it out (2 Cor 4:10).

Many peoples (11) = the gospel is for everyone.

THE TWO WITNESSES

Read Revelation 11:1–14

The Temple (11:1–3)

This is not the *hieron*, the whole temple building, but the *naos*, the holy of holies. This latter word (*naos*) is used consistently in the NT whenever the church is called a temple (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21). Interestingly, it is used of the ‘temple of God’ in which the lawless one sits (2 Thess 2:4), which is clearly a reference to the church not the Jewish temple (which is no longer the temple of God). C.f. Jesus’s reference to ‘false Christs’ (Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22).

- Altar (1): a symbol of sacrifice (Rom 12:1–2) and/or of prayer (8:4).
- Those who worship there (1): all numbered and known to God
- The outer court (of the Gentiles) = the world.

The time period of 42 months, 1260 days (2, 3) is symbolic of the Age of Grace, not literal. Numeric symbolism is universal in the Apocalypse. Here it is used of the period from Pentecost to Parousia. The numbers cannot be literal, as the months are all of 30 days, which results in a 360–day year. So, 42 months = 1260 days = ‘a time, and times and half a time’, i.e. 3.5 *prophetic* years. See also 12:6; 12:14; 13:5. All obviously refer to the same time frame. To take these days as actual days is inconsistent with taking the Monster, the False Prophet etc, as symbolic figures. This is a book of spiritually symbolic (*pneumatikos*, v.8), apocalyptic language and needs to be taken as such. People often represent movements or countries (17:10 = realms).

Parallels: 42 stopping places in the Exodus (Num 33:5–49); 42 cities of refuge (Num 35:6); 3 ½ years of drought in the days of Elijah (James 5:17); the prophecy of Daniel (7:25; 12:7 14); 42 Messianic generations (Matt 1:17); the period of the ministry of Jesus; the traumatic days of Antiochus Epiphanes.⁵

The Two Witnesses

Many people see the two witnesses as individuals—Moses and Elijah, William Branham and Billy Graham etc.⁶ Remembering the principle of spiritual (*pneumatikos*) symbolism it is important not to see these witnesses as individual persons. They are symbolic. Many suggestions have been made—the Law and the Prophets, the Jews and the Lost Tribes of Israel, the Bible and the Church, Law and Grace, the OT and the NT and so on. Taking a clue from Zechariah, it seems valid to argue that they represent two major thrusts of Christian ministry, typified initially in chapter five by Jesus being presented as both Lion and Lamb. To broaden this slightly, it can be argued (e.g., Dumbrell, Bingham) that they represent both the princely and the priestly ministry of the Church (1 Peter 2:9) which is predicated earlier in Rev 5:10. On the other hand, they are also identified as prophets (3, 6). In this way they reflect the threefold ministry of Christ who is Prophet, Priest and King.

- Sackcloth (3): black, sign of mourning and perhaps repentance (Mt 1:21; Lk 10:13; Rev 6:12). See Daniel 9:2–6, 17–19; Jesus (Matt 23:37)
- Two witnesses = the biblical principle of true witness (Deut 17:7; 19:15; Matt 18:16–20; 2 Cor 13:1).
- Prophecy (3, 6): they represent the prophetic ministry of Christ who is also Prince and Priest.
- Joshua and Zerubbabel: Prince and Priest (Zech 3:1–10).
- Olive trees and lampstands (4). See Zechariah 4:1–14.
- We are a kingdom of priests—which was always God’s intention. Ex 19:6; Num 3:12, 41; Zech 4:14; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10.
- Priest: to offer sacrifice, to be crucified with Christ (John 12:24; Rom 6:6; 12:1–2; 2 Cor 4:7–12; Gal 2:20)
- Prince: to reign in life (Rom 5:17), to be raised with Christ (Rom 6:3–4; Gal 2:20). ‘Come up here’ = resurrection life?
- The authority of the witnesses (4–6).
- When (7) is actually ‘whenever’ (*otan*) and indicates repetitive occurrences rather than just one event.
- The ‘beast’ here is probably the same as in chapter 13.
- Fire, drought, blood, plague—all *pneumatikos* (11:8). A literalistic application of causing plague, torment etc, is incompatible with Christ’s kingdom. These must be seen as spiritual, emotional, cognitive manifestations such as guilt, conviction, frustration etc, of unrepentant sinners. (But see 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 1; Ex 7:14; 8:1).

5 Antiochus Epiphanes (= ‘God manifest’). A Greek Seleucid ruler (215–164), allowed to reign with Roman consent from 175–164. Tried to invade Egypt and steal it from the Romans. Initially the Roman ambassador named Popillius confronted him alone, and told him to withdraw. Antiochus asked for time to consult his officers. Popillius drew a circle in the sand around him and told him that if he took one step outside that line Rome would be at war with him. Hence the expression ‘line in the sand’. He conceded. Later he tried to bring peace in Jerusalem by reconciling Hellenistic and Orthodox factions. He sacrificed pigs in the temple area, installed a statue of Zeus, forbade circumcision and slaughtered those who disagreed. Hence the Maccabean revolt and its intense suffering.

6 Ronald Weinland, ‘It is now with boldness, confidence and great clarity that I give to you what God has given me. I am to announce, through God’s direct revelation, that I am one of those two witnesses. The other witness will be revealed to the world during the time of the great tribulation’ R. Weinland: *God’s Final Witness*. (2006, 16).

- 'Kill them' must be taken symbolically. They lie dead for 3 ½ days—very short compared with 1260 days and indicates a temporary slump in witness, as happens irregularly in churches. The gospel may be quelled but only for a short time.
- Bodies (8) = singular 'body' (Greek) indicating complete unity
- Sodom and Egypt (8). These are clearly stated as *pneumatikos* terms. Egypt is a country, not a city, but this does not seem significant. Historically, both Sodom and Egypt represent death, disaster, plagues, slavery etc, and in particular here the crucifixion of Christ. Jerusalem? Or every place that rejects the gospel of Jesus? i.e., the world.
- Peoples, tribes, languages and nations (9). The universal nature of the prophetic ministry of the witnesses.
- Those who receive the Word by faith are blessed; those who reject it are cursed.

The Seventh Trumpet

Read Revelation 11:16–19

Earthquake means that: everything is shaken (government, education, religion, society). But God's kingdom finally triumphs (15). The 24 elders fall down and worship. In spite of the struggles and momentary defeats of the Two Witnesses, they praise God for:

- His immortality
- His power
- His reign
- His judgement
- His rewards
- His destruction of the destroyer

The Church

Finally, John has a glorious and frightening vision of 'God's temple (*naos*) in heaven' and the ark of his covenant (19), symbolising his glory and presence and atonement for sin. Note the pronoun 'his'. All is guaranteed by this everlasting covenant (Ex 37:1–9; Lev 16:1–5, 11–19). In spite of all attacks and troubles, God is clearly and unarguably God!

- Lightning, thunder, earthquake, heavy hail (19): God's presence is shown by dramatic light and sound. He has the last word!
- All OT prophecies are fulfilled through Christ (2 Cor 1:20; 1 Pet 1:10–12)
- We are sons of Abraham by faith (Jn 8:39–44; Rom 2:28f; 4:16–5:1; Gal 3:26–29)
- God's people are the true Israel (Rom 9:6–8, 23–26; Hos 1:6–10; Gal 6:16; Eph 2:11–22; 1 Pet 2:9f)
- The Old Covenant is superseded by the New (Heb 7:11–28; 8:1–13; 9:1–28)
- Jesus has inherited the throne of David (Is 9:6–7; Ps 89:29–37; Jer 33:20–22; Act 2:30–33)

6—THE WILDERNESS WOMAN

A Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as we come to your Word today, we pray for sharp minds to understand and soft hearts to believe. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Read Revelation 12:1–17

This chapter clearly describes an ongoing battle between The church and Satan. Leon Morris writes:

*The whole of Revelation is written to a church which faced persecution ... every section of the book is designed to help harassed believers ... Especially is this so with the section to which we now come. It stresses the important truth that God has decisively defeated the devil ... The evil one has been cast out of heaven. His power on earth is, to be sure, terrifyingly real to believers. But this is not because he is triumphant. It is because he knows he is beaten and has but a short time. Let the church then take heart ... Yet we should add that no part of the book is more difficult to interpret in detail ...*⁷

Some of the details seem inconsistent or puzzling. The overall picture is what matters. The major theme is encouragement, hope for the future in an age of persecution.

A Great Sign

- Great sign (1): a reminder that this is a book of signs. This is a 'great' sign. An image of splendour (c.f. Song 6:10: 'beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners.')
- Sun, moon and stars = Israel (Gen 37:9, 10). Also the church (Rom 9:6; Gal 6:16).
- Sun = sovereignty; moon = footstool i.e., authority; crown (*stephanos*) = victory; twelve stars = family of God (Gen 15:5; 37:9)
- Pregnant (2). Not with Jesus (the church is his bride—Eph 5:32; Rev 19:6–8) but with more 'children' i.e., believers, disciples.

The Dragon (3)

- Dragon: another sign. A fierce sea creature, Leviathan; serpent (14). Ps 74:13–14; Isaiah 51:9–10
- Red = cruel, angry (see also 17:3)
- Seven heads. Counterfeit deity.
- Ten horns: Horn = power (Ps 18:2; 88:17; 89:17; 92:10; Jer 48:25). Seven heads but ten horns = usurped power.
- Seven diadems (*diadema*): counterfeit monarchy, political authority that can be falsely claimed (not *stephanos* that has to be won)

THE WILDERNESS WOMAN

- Devour (4): Satan tries to destroy the church at its inception (1 Pet 5:8)
- Male child (5): new-born church.
- Rod of iron (5): destined to reign.
- Caught up (5): heavenly places (Eph 2:6)
- Wilderness (6): this world. The world may be a desert, but in Scripture, the desert is also a place to meet God (as Moses, Jesus, Paul). Jesus was driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit; He met wild animals; He was tempted by Satan; angels ministered to Him and He returned in the power of the Spirit (Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1–14). Bunyan: '... the wilderness of this world.'
- 1260 days: 42 months, 3 ½ times—the church age (see on ch.11).

War In Heaven

This passage illustrates the interpretative options facing us. Is this still future or did it begin long ago? If the visions are universal, are there layers of meaning or application?

⁷ Morris, 1981, 155.

- Michael (7): an archangel.
- Ancient serpent (9) now identified as the Devil, Satan.
- Cast out of heaven (9): See Luke 10:19. Before creation? At the resurrection? In the future? Clue: 'Now' (10).
- Accuser (10): 'Satan' means 'adversary'.
- Salvation (10): has **now** come.

Blessings mentioned so far that are now evident in this present age.

- Salvation (Acts 16:31)
- Power (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8)
- Kingdom (Matt 12:28; Lk 10:9; 11:20; 17:21)
- Authority (Luke 10:19)
- Victory (11): by (*dia*) the blood/sacrifice of the Lamb and the word of testimony. Note that *dia* can mean either 'by means of' (+ genitive case) or 'on the basis of' (+ accusative). It has the latter meaning here, stressing the objective grounds of the gospel
- Joy (12): 'O heavens' = people of God

However, there is also woe and persecution (12–13). Recall chapter six. Also, parables like the wheat and the weeds, the poison fish etc (Matt 13:24–30, 34–36; 47–50).

- Earth and sea (12): Satan is the cause of many of the world's woes
- Pursued (13): compare 1 Peter 5:8
- Eagle's wings (14): Deut 32:11; Isaiah 40:31
- Times (14): 1260 days, 42 months (9)
- Water (15): an evil spiritual tsunami—atheism, secularism, terrorism etc?
- Rest of offspring (17): Those who keep God's commandments and the testimony of Jesus

The conflict is violent and the cause is great, but victory is assured to God's people.

AN UNHOLY TRINITY

Read Revelation chapters 12 and 13

These chapters present an unholy trinity: The Dragon, the Monster, the False Prophet

The Dragon (12:3–17)

The Dragon = Satan: seven heads, ten horns, seven diadems (12:3).

- Wipes out 1/3 of stars. (4) = angels?
- Tries to destroy Christ (4, 5)
- Cast out of heaven (8, 9)
- Tries to destroy the church (12, 15–17)
- Hardship and suffering
- Jesus suffered for us
- We are called to follow this example (1 Peter 2:21; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 3:12)
- Christianity was born in suffering e.g., Jesus, martyrs.
- There is need for patient endurance (Rev 1:9; 2:3; 2:19; 13:9, 10; 14:12).

The constant theme of the book is overcoming in the face of demonic opposition. (Without opposition the concept of conquest is meaningless.) Our attention is drawn frequently to victory not escape.

The Monster from the Sea

Read Revelation 13:1–18

The term 'monster' simply means wild animal, or beast, but its appearance is so grotesque that 'monster' is a fair translation. It usurps power. It has more horns than it ought. It represents universal political power (2).

- It is an amalgam of the four Monsters of Daniel 7:3–7: Lion = Babylon; Bear = Medo-Persia; Leopard = Greece; Terrifying Monster = Rome
- It has power, a throne and authority
- Its power comes from the dragon (2, 4)
- It constantly re-emerges in another form (3; see also 17:8)
- People give allegiance to it and the force behind it (3, 4, 8)
- It tries to usurp the authority of Christ (1–7) who has 'many crowns' (19:12)
- Utters proud words (5)
- Its reign spans the gospel age symbolised by 42 months (5)
- Utters blasphemies against God and his people i.e., his 'dwelling' (5, 6)
- Its political power is exercised against God's people
- It is given power to make war on the saints and conquer them (13:7, 10)
- Suffering is part of following Christ (Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 3:12; 2 Tim 1:8; 1 Peter 2:21)
- So there is a need for patient endurance (1:9; 2:3; 2:19; 13:10; 14:12 ...)
- Its dominion is universal. It is given authority over every tribe, nation, language and people (13:7)
- This power is accepted by non-Christians (13:8)

The False Prophet (Second Beast)

The Monster from the earth is also called the False Prophet (19:20). He is a counterfeit Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit's role is to glorify Christ, the False Prophet's role is to promote the Monster (13:12).

- horns like a lamb
- makes people worship the Monster
- performs miraculous signs
- deceives people
- sets up an image of the Monster
- gives life to the image
- forces everyone to have the Monster's mark
- without the mark, people cannot earn a livelihood

The Monster's Mark

- Either on the right hand or on the forehead (13:16)
- Either the name of the Monster or the number (*arithmos*) of the name (13:17)
- The number of (a) man
- The number is 666
- Spiritually symbolic (*pneumatikos*)

But the real issue is what all this means in practical terms. The simplest comparison would be with Deuteronomy 6:8, 9 where the Hebrews were told to bind the Word of God to their heads and hands. Orthodox Jews still do this by tying phylacteries to themselves. But we understand it to be a *pneumatikos* command.

- Right hand = actions i.e., working life
- See Ex 6:6; Deut 4:34; 7:19; Num 11:23; Job 26:2; Ps 24:4; 40:10; Jer 27:5; Ezek 30:21f
- Forehead = thoughts i.e., personal life
- Ex 13:9; 13:16; 28:38; Nu 24:17; Deut 11:18

So with the mark of the Monster. A physical mark or tattoo is irrelevant. is who controls our words and actions? The Master or the Monster? Four further on, we have the answer. The redeemed of the Lord follow the wherever he goes (14:4).



89:13; Is



The issue
verses
Lamb

A Frightening Combination

The Monster = political power; the False Prophet = religious power.

Religion and Politics (Church and State) form a frightening combination. When the sword (political) is put in the hands of the devotees of a belief system (religious) the danger is that they will use it! And because they believe their religion is divinely inspired, they cannot be wrong. This even applies in reverse: science in western society commonly has the same kind of infallibility.

Examples: Roman Empire, where Caesar was a god; the Medieval Church; Islam; contemporary atheism; scientism. Given this insight, it is clear how the Apocalypse always seems to be relevant, because such circumstances are constantly in place.

7—THE CALL FOR ENDURANCE

The Number 666

Greek and Hebrew letters also act as numbers. So 'Nero Caesar' adds up to 666. But Nero was long-since dead when Revelation was written and not really relevant. Irenaeus was careful to say that it would be better to wait and see, but dabbled with a few ideas such as that Noah's age at the time of the flood (600 years) and the height (60 cubits) and width (6 cubits) of Nebuchnezzar's image provided three sixes. He also suggested several words where the letters as numbers added up to 666 e.g., 'Lateinos' = $30+1+300+5+10+50+70+200 = 666$. There is also the complication that some manuscripts read 616.

Over the years many names have been suggested e.g., Hitler, Mussolini (Van Eyk), Stalin, Henry Kissinger (Barry Smith), Mustapha Kamal (Lancaster), the Pope (Luther, Huss, Latimer etc). Other suggestions include barcodes and credit cards. Of all these possibilities, by far the most popular suggestion in its day and for hundreds of years after, was that of the Pope. In the original dedication to the King James Bible of 1611, which was still being included in printed copies until the mid-twentieth century, the translators thanked King James for his 'defence of the Truth' which, they said, had 'given such a blow to that man of sin', the Pope, as would not be healed. They went on to thank the king for frequenting the house of God, hearing the Word preached, cherishing the Teachers thereof and caring for the Church, and to hope that they would not be traduced by Popish Persons' because they were but poor instruments to make God's holy Truth to be yet more and more known.

However, for the number 666 to be meaningful it has to be universal: it must be relevant for all people everywhere of all time (13:7)

If there is a number for divine perfection it would probably be 777. (3 For God; 7 for perfect). Those numbers, of multiples of those numbers, occur frequently in the Apocalypse). If there is a number for human striving for perfection it would be always falling short of that (Romans 3:23) it would be 'man's number' (Rev 13:18) i.e., 666. It is also of interest that the letter-numbers of the Greek word *Iesous* (Jesus) add to 888.

144,000 — *It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes* (14:4).

Read Revelation 14:6–13

Hope, Holiness and Hades

While there is much about redemption and reigning with Christ here, there is also a solemn focus on justice. This passage warns us of the solemnity of God's eternal purpose. It begins with good news:

- An eternal gospel: for every age (the absence of the definite article is puzzling)
- Gospel = good news
- Proclaim = tell good news
- Every = every person ever born
- Fear = strong respect



- Give God glory for the hour of judgement
- Judgement = can mean 'decision' (i.e., giving people opportunity to choose) or 'justice' (i.e. setting right all wrongs)
- Worship: The God of Creation (significant for a post-Darwinian generation)

Babylon The Great

- Babylon = the culture of the world (typified by Rome).
- Equates to the Monster.
- Fallen: see 12:10.
- Wine (8): signifies pleasure, the flesh, self-seeking etc.
- Sexual immorality: was widespread in Rome (e.g., Pompeii) as it is today in western culture. It is also a symbol throughout Scripture of sin, infidelity, apostasy ... See Ezek 16:1–59; Hosea 2:1–23; 3:1–5.
- Full-strength wine (10) = God's wrath, anger.
- Fire and sulphur = frustration, despair, anguish.
- Holy angels: present with Jesus, a reminder of what the ungodly have lost.
- Torment: pain.
- No rest: ever (11). C.f. 4:8; 15:8. Compare the legend of Tantalus.
- Saints: those who are set apart, holy, obedient, trusting.
- Rest: relief, relaxation, a 'break' (13). Compare 'no rest' for Monster-worshippers (11).
- Labours: actions, deeds.
- Follow: No need for more deeds: what has been well done remains with them.

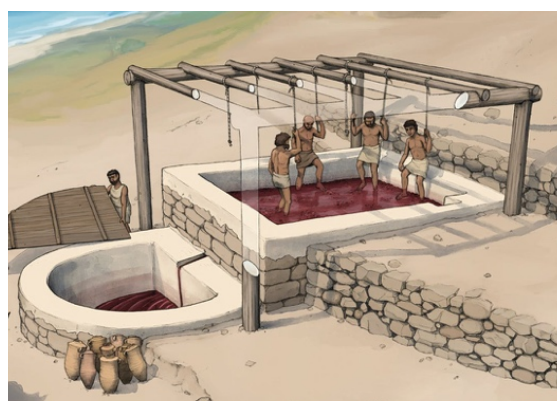
Endure Patiently

In the midst of judgement and wrath, those who are holy (saints), obedient and trusting are called to patient endurance. The word is *hupomone* = 'remaining under', as in carrying a load. It implies going through tribulation not being plucked out of it. See 1:9 where John sets the tone right at the beginning of the book by calling himself a fellow-partner with his readers/hearers both in tribulation and in patient endurance 'in Jesus'. See also Heb 12:1.

Harvest Time

Read Revelation 14:14–20

- Son of Man (14)—Jesus?
- Crown (*stephanos*) = victory
- Angels giving instruction—perhaps as messengers
- Sharp sickle = to cut down
- First harvest (15–16) = of grain, the godly (Matt 9:37–38; 13:36–43; 24:31)
- Second harvest (17–20) = of grapes, the ungodly (Matt 13:36–43; 24:31)
- Winepress = place of treading down and crushing evil. Wine symbolises blood.
- 300 kms: Represents immeasurable number of bodies. Necessarily symbolic. Indescribable judgement. A solemn warning.



SOUNDS OF JUSTICE

Read Revelation 15:1–8

This short chapter shows God's integrity in judgement/justice (1, 5–8)

- Seven 'great and amazing' angels (1)
- Plagues (1) come from God.
- Sea of glass (2) = tranquillity, peace
- Overcomers: sing songs of Moses and the Lamb (3–4). Harps = worship
- Moses (servant of God) and Jesus (Lamb of God); Law and Grace; OT and NT. Unified message.
- From the *naos*, the Holy Place (5)

For Moses' song see Ex 15:1–18. The song of the Lamb (3, 4) is about justice, an unusual theme for a song.

Summary: Addressed to the Lord God Almighty (*pantokrator*) = all (*pan*) + ruling, sovereign; His works are great and amazing (9x in Revelation—1:8; 4:8; 16:7, 14; 11:17; 19:6, 15; 21:22); His ways are fair and just (5, 7); He is sovereign King over all nations; His name is to be feared and glorified; He alone is truly holy (*hosios*). This term means 'fully demonstrating all righteous requirements' or 'ethical spotlessness ... a very down-to-earth holiness' (Bingham). Those same nations will come (i.e., take action) and worship Him as they are now aware of His righteous acts as they have been revealed to them (*phaneroo* = made plain, made manifest)

The Seven Bowls

The final depiction of God's ongoing dealing with humankind. Again, angels are the administrators of God's wrath. Interestingly, they come from the *naos* in heaven, but this time not from the temple but from the tabernacle (the tent of witness) initiated in the wilderness of the Exodus. Again, here is a reminder that it is sometimes in the desert places that God is most plainly to be found.

- pure (*katharos*) = free from contamination (c.f. cathartic)
- bright (*lampros*) linen = radiant, clear, pure
- Golden sash = wealth; the sash covers the heart
- Golden bowls: objects of value
- Full: maximum amount
- Forever and ever: to the ages of the ages
- Smoke: smoke/cloud veils the brightness of God's glory (1 Kings 8:10; Is 6:4)
- Glory and power: the smoke cloud is protective, not only veiling the glory of God, but also his power. Both are more than mortality can bear.
- No one could enter the *naos*: because of the smoke cloud.

On the wrath of God

There are two common words in the NT. The word used here (*thumos*) indicates passion (of various kinds) or fury, rather than measured wrath (*orge*). *Thumos* occurs 15 times and *orge* 29 times in the NT and in Revelation, 8 times and 5 times respectively. In the NT, the two terms are often used interchangeably, although *thumos* tends to be employed in reference to people and *orge* of God, no doubt because passion is seen as more likely to be impulsive than considered. Even so, a distinction in meaning is indicated in Eph 4:31; Col 3:8 and there was a general understanding that the former had to do more with 'agitation of the feelings' and the latter with 'an abiding and settled habit of mind'.⁸ In Revelation, the two terms are clearly distinguished in 16:19 and 19:15 —'The fury (*thumos*) of his wrath (*orge*)'. The revelator seems eager to remind us that wickedness both offends God's law (*orge*) and wounds God's heart (*thumos*). Both justice and love.

⁸ R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953, 1976, 131.

8—THE GREAT PROSTITUTE OF BABYLON

SIDE QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

The Rapture?

Recap on Wrath

Tribulation

A Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as we come to your Word today, we pray for sharp minds to understand and soft hearts to believe. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Read Revelation 16:1–21

The bowls are poured out on those who follow the Monster (16:2). They reflect the plagues in ancient Egypt and cover sea, earth and sky. These various disasters, even though permitted by God, together signify the inevitable outcome of sin. However, they are to be understood, they clearly affirm the righteousness of God.

The Seven Bowls

- #1 Painful sores (2). Like leprosy, a sign of the result of sin?
- #2 Sea creatures all die (3)
- #3 Water becomes blood (4). Blood of martyrs avenged
- The altar speaks (7): obviously symbolic. If this is the altar of sacrifice = insight into bloodshed; if of incense = prayer (Psalm 73:15–18)
- The integrity of God is again affirmed (5–7)—his judgements are 'just and true' (also 15:3; 19:2). Their purpose: To maintain moral rectitude on which humanity's survival depends and to rectify the injustices of life. Justice is justice. Always fair. Not all receive equal penalties (20:12; 1 Cor 3:12–15) e.g., *Heaven's Gates* show
- Was allowed (8): evidently by God (sovereign)
- #4 Heat waves (9)
- #5 Darkness and pain (10)
- People curse God (11). The choices are: **Resent** = be angry with God; **Relent** = feel sorry; **Repent** = feel sorry enough to change your mind and behaviour (*metanoieo*).
- #6 Unclean spirits released (12–16)
- We are to be prepared to meet God (15)? Note the graphic image: not being caught with our pants down!
- There is enough certainty to promote hope and enough uncertainty to promote holiness. Yes, he is coming. But we don't know when.

Armageddon

Armageddon occurs on the great day of God the Almighty (14, 16)

- Assemble for battle (14): In fact, there is no record of the battle actually occurring. It is a non-event.
- Its source (13, 14): the unholy trinity of dragon, Monster and False Prophet i.e., the whole gamut of sin, rebellion and wilfulness.
- International war? (Lindsey, Foster). There is no war.
- Loud voice from the throne (17): evidently the voice of God.
- Is this actually a reference to the Cross? 'It is done' (17). Compare John 19:30; Col 2:14–15
- The gospel: Weaponry = sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:18; 2 Cor 10:5).

The Great City (17–21)

- #7 The last bowl results in widespread destruction.
- Thunder etc (18): wild and fierce and turbulent conditions enough to bring terror to humanity. The overall picture is important here, whatever the details may mean.
- Great earthquake (18): Unprecedented. Geological or societal?
- Babylon (18, 19): Here and in the next chapter a model of corrupt human society. She is the 'great city' (19)—no doubt thought to be Rome in the first century, but in fact she is all cities and no city (Morris). She is Rome—and also London, New York, Paris, Sydney, and all of them and none of them. She is in biblical terms the world which is passing away (1 John 2:14–17).
- Islands, hailstones etc (20, 21): There is no escape. Again, 100 pound hailstones are impossible. All of these cataclysmic phenomena are spiritually symbolic (*pneumatikos*) of the downfall of all godless principalities, powers, names, authorities, rulers and celebrities (Eph 1:21; Romans 8:38–39) in every sphere—politics, industry, trade, entertainment, music, sport—and of the domino effects on all life.

Over and over, the Apocalypse reminds us of the fragility of human government and structure (as witnessed in AD 2020 and AD 2021) and our need to rest our trust and hope only in the Creator and Saviour. Yet in many parts of the world, there are still more signs of relenting and resenting, than of genuine repenting.

THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

Read Revelation 17:1–18

As we have seen, the Monster represents political power and the False Prophet religious power. The prostitute symbolises hedonism, living for pleasure. What we see here is an almost universal trend with powers of various kinds. They begin with fierce determination, discipline, sacrifice and ruthless tactics. Gradually they amass more power to themselves, engage in various forms of totalitarianism (even slavery) and settle down to enjoy the riches and pleasures they have won. This lazy lifestyle eats away at their resolve and gradually the power so dearly bought is eroded and a new rival force emerges. This passage contains a warning for western civilisation: are we in the prostitution stage? It is also a warning for church groups who have reached a comfortable phase in their development.

The Woman (1–6)

John is again taken in the Spirit into the desert (think of Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1) where he is shown a woman adorned with jewellery and dressed in purple and scarlet like a prostitute (compare the white robes of the redeemed) and seated on a scarlet monster covered in blasphemous names with seven heads and ten horns, possibly the Monster from the sea of chapter 13 (17:1, 15). John is told that the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality (*porneia*) to great excess ('drunk'). Her name is a mystery (i.e., *mysterion* = secret) and she is 'the mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations', in other words of spiritual infidelity and wilfulness. She is also responsible for the deaths of the martyrs—drunk with their blood. To John this no doubt meant actual martyrs (6:9–11; 18:24; 19:2) but it is likely that it also refers to dying to self and to all earthly treasures (Jn 14:24–25; 2 Cor 4:10; Gal 2:20).

Monsters, Mountains and Monarchs (7–13)

The Monster seems to be reincarnate—he appears to die but keeps coming back (7–8). Those who have taken his mark are impressed (8b). The secret mentioned earlier is that the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated—Rome? Jerusalem? And then there are eighteen kings (= kingdoms, states, countries) whose identity appears to baffle every commentator. The numbers have no obvious significance, either historically or religiously, and perhaps John is simply saying that no matter how many there are and how they are arranged, they cannot defeat the Lamb.

The Conquest of the Lamb (14–18)

Led by the Monster, the powers make war on the Lamb, but he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and they are defeated. It is like a host of insects attacking a human being who just treads them under foot. Again, to take all this as literal materialist warfare is inconsistent with the gospel. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor 10:5). The sword of his mouth (the Word of God, Eph 6:17; Hab 4:10) is Christ's weapon and it is by the Cross and our testimony that victory is accomplished (Rev 12:11).

Finally, the woman is identified. She is actually 'the great city' (i.e., Babylon). But now the nations all turn against her, and they destroy her. This they do by yielding to the Monster (17:13, 18) which is probably their own downfall as well.

The way of the Lamb is not the way of the Monster. It is the last strategy any earthly leader would consider when faced with enemy attacks. Yet our calling is still to follow the Lamb wherever he goes. It is the way of the Cross. For the godly, it is the only way.

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Read Revelation 18:1–24

The Sudden Fall of the Prostitute (1–19)

The angel (1)—if his glory makes the earth bright, what does God's glory do? The Prostitute's sins are listed—demons, uncleanness, *porneia*, adultery, drunkenness, luxurious lifestyle, selfishness, pride ('I sit as a queen').

The kings of the earth mourn and grieve over her demise which has happened suddenly and unexpectedly (10, 12, 19).

They have all made money from trade with her in six areas: mining, textiles, manufacturing, cosmetics, food and forced labour, including slavery (11–13). Compare the Great Depression and similar socio-economic phenomena.

Two Messages for the Saints, Apostles and Prophets (1–20)

- #1: Come out of her (4) lest we become partakers in her sins. Compromise is always a danger for believers NB in times of prosperity.
- #2: Rejoice at her downfall (20) for God's judgement has been fair. Even if we suffer loss in the process.
- The finality of judgement (21–24). Note the repetition of the phrase 'no more' (6x). Literally: 'not ... not ...' or 'never'.
- No more music, craftsmanship, mills, lamplight, marriage, trading—in other words, social, political, commercial life will end.
- There is an implicit warning here of the danger of making material or physical pleasures the source or meaning of happiness. None of these can survive. Even natural, God-given pleasure is ephemeral. Its satisfaction is always short-lived. Christ alone is the ultimate source of fulfilment.

9—THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

A Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as we come to your Word today, we pray for sharp minds to understand and soft hearts to believe. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Read Revelation 19:1–21

The Great Contrast (1–10)

- John hears a sound as of the voices of a great crowd in heaven saying (singing?) praise to God for his true and fair judgements on the Great Prostitute. She is finally judged for two sins—harlotry and bloodshed (1, 2). Twice they shout, 'Hallelujah!'
- They are delighted that her smoke goes up forever. This seems vindictive but remember the woman represents a system, not a person, and it is appropriate to rejoice at such an outcome.
- The elders and the four living creatures join in (4)—taking us back to where the visions started (chapter four).
- The contrast is between the Prostitute and the Bride of Christ (6–8).
- Once again John hears the sound of a great crowd like torrents and thunder (6), obviously joyful. Compare 1:15; 5:13; 14:2.
- The marriage supper (9). As the Bride comprises all the people of God, no doubt the guests are angelic beings.
- John's impulsive action (10, also 22:8–9)) seems out of character but perhaps he is overtaken by the ecstatic joy of the moment, although the word worship (*proskuneo*) may simply mean to bow or pay homage. As it happens, the result is one of the most significant statements in the whole book. The Testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Everything must point to Jesus.

The Prostitute	The bride
Lavish scarlet clothing (17:3)	Fine bright (white?) clothing (19:8)
Clothing no doubt from profiteering (18:11)	Clothing a gift of grace granted to her from God (19:8)
<i>Porneia</i> (19:2)	Purity (19:8)
Evil deeds (19:2)	Righteous deeds (19:8)
Everlasting destruction (19:3)	Everlasting life (21:1–7)

It is difficult to read this passage without thinking of Ephesians 5:21–32.

The Rider on the White Horse (19:11–17)

This vision is one of the most striking in the whole book. Although individuals in the Apocalypse usually represent groups or movements, here the individual surely represents Jesus.

- Heaven opens to reveal him (11)
- White horse = warrior king
- Faithful and True: undoubtedly attributes of Christ (John 14:6; 18:37)
- Righteous judgement and warfare
- Eyes like flames of fire (12; 1:14)
- Many diadems—more than the Dragon (seven, 12:3) or the Monster (ten, 13:1)
- A name known only to Himself (still not to anyone else!) Not His only name.
- Clothed in a blood-dyed robe (13)—signifying the Cross. See 7:14; Isaiah 63:1–3, 6, which clearly expresses deity.
- Called the Word of God—see John 1: 1–3.
- Followed by the armies of heaven all in white (14)
- A sharp sword in His mouth: when He speaks it is God's Word

- He will rule the nations
- He will dispense the fury (*thumos*) and wrath (*orge*) of God. Also 16:19.
- His name is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Battle—Flesh (19:17–21)

The imagery here is vivid and shocking. Birds are summoned to eat the flesh of both high and low (17–18). The language is that of battle, the weapon of Jesus is the sword of the Spirit, and it is by this that he conquers and slays the enemy (21)—the carnage is not physical. But the judgement is no less real for all that.

Is this in fact a parable of how the gospel goes forth and people either resent the gospel or repent of their sins. Either way they must capitulate to the Word.

The engagement is a non-event. The Monster and his associates attempt to make war, but no battle occurs for they are immediately captured (19–20).

We are reminded of the Mark of the Monster and associated signs. All are now meaningless.

The Lake of Fire (20)

The Monster and the False Prophet are thrown into the lake of fire (20). Again, not literal fire but spiritual and psychological burning and yearning. Constant hunger and yet nothing to assuage it including death.

Contrary to popular opinion, Satan's dwelling is an arid, dry, cold, dark place (Matt 12:43). In Scripture, it is called the abyss, a term that means bottomless or unfathomable, a dreadful concept beyond human imagining. It is the abode of evil spirits including Apollyon and the Beast (Lk 8:31; Rev 9:2, 11; 11:7; 17:8). It is like a prison from which they constantly try to escape (Luke 8:31) but where they are constantly confined by the power of God (Rev 20:1–3). Something like smoke emerges from it, but there is no fire. The smoke just brings darkness (Revelation 9:2; c.f. 2 Corinthians 4:4).

The popular image of a fiery red devil surrounded by flames has no biblical warrant. Only at the end will the devil be cast into fire — and it will destroy him (Rev 20:10,13). Destructive fire has been especially prepared for him and his angels (Matt 25:41). Everything we know about Satan's present existence is dark, sinister and chilling (Col 1:13; 1 Thess 5:4ff; 2 Peter 2:4). Anecdotally, his presence is often indicated by a feeling of coldness and darkness. But the kingdom of heaven is associated with light, love and warmth (Col 1:13; 1 John 2:9–11; Rev 21:23–26; 22:5).⁹

All of this warns us to take solemnly the seriousness of sin and of God's wrath. Thank God for his mercy in Jesus.

A THOUSAND YEARS IN CHAINS

Read Revelation 20:1–15

This chapter deals with what is commonly known as the Millennium. Popular eschatology is usually categorized into:

Premillennialism: the millennium is a literal 1000 year period at the end of the age beginning with the return of Christ during which Satan is captured and bound and after which he is released to again deceive the nations. During this period, believers reign with Christ over the earth. Various expressions of this view can be found in the Patristic writings (Epistle of Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus) but writers like Calvin dismissed it. The view was popularized in the 19th Century by Edward Irving, by J N Darby and by the *Scofield Reference Bible*. Futurists tend to embrace a pre-tribulation rapture; historicists seen the tribulation as having existed since Pentecost and tend to identify the Monster as the Papal system and believe the rapture and the Parousia are contemporaneous.

⁹ B. Chant, *This Means War*, Mt Barker: Tabor, unpublished manuscript, 2021.

Amillennialism: the millennium is another name for the gospel age and covers the same period as the Great Tribulation, during which Satan's power is restrained and believers reign in life through Christ. Augustine more or less held to this view.

Postmillennialism: the millennium is a period during which Satan is bound and chained and the gospel gradually 'Christianises' the world and at the end of which Christ returns. This view was held by people like Jonathan Edwards, William Carey and Richard Johnson. Edwards saw the Antichrist (the Monster) as the Papacy but believed that Christ's kingdom of grace would be 'everywhere established'.¹⁰

'Postmillennialism is expressed in great hymns like Isaac Watts's 'Jesus Shall Reign', H. E. Nicholls's 'We've a Story to Tell to the Nations', Matthew Bridges' 'Crown Him with Many Crowns' and H. Burton's 'There's a Light Upon the Mountains' which all reflect confidence and hope in the power of the gospel to usher in God's kingdom. This view was particularly popular in the great missionary expansion of the 19th Century.

Given the principles laid down at the beginning of this study, we can make the following observations. Note that it is the overall picture that is important.

- The number 1000 (20:2) must be taken symbolically. The years are no doubt prophetic years of 360 days. $1000 = 10 \times 10 \times 10$, suggesting a symbolic cubist concept (as in the new Jerusalem (21:16). 'The millennium is to be equated with the church age'.¹¹ There is nothing here to suggest the millennium is to be an idyllic state of peace and prosperity.
- Satan (20:2) = adversary; ancient serpent (as in Eden) and the Devil (tempter, deceiver as in 20:7, 10; Matt 4:1ff; Luke 4:1ff).
- Satan was 'bound' at the Cross (2 Cor 2:14; Eph 1:19–23; Col 2:15).
- Deceive: Satan's strategy has now been laid bare and his deceptions revealed (2 Cor 2:11). Compare finding the plans of a gang of thieves who are plotting to rob your home. They would no longer be able to deceive you or steal from you.
- Thrones: those seated on them (4) = angels?
- Two groups of people (4): martyrs (those who have been crucified with Christ as in Gal 2:20) and those who refused the mark of the Monster (those who are sanctified, Rom 6:6-11) now reign with Christ. This is the ongoing state of believers (Rom 5:17). This is the first resurrection = new birth in Christ (Romans 6:1-4).
- Reign with Christ (4, 6): stated twice; our present position by faith, reigning not over people but over sin, evil, the devil etc (Rom 5:17-21; Eph 2:6).
- Second death (6): i.e., John 3:16; Romans 6:23.
- Priests of God and of Christ: our present position (1 Peter 2:9).
- Satan released (7–10): the reason for this action, no matter how we interpret it, is difficult to fathom. The word 'when' is literally 'whenever' which indicates an inconclusive time or perhaps even multiple times (Morris). Perhaps it is just the divine way of tying things together and finally wrapping everything up.
- God and Magog (8): These two are mentioned in the OT, albeit rarely (Gen 10:2; 1 Chron 1:5; 5:4). Ezekiel denounces Gog, from the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, for leading many armies against Israel. Here they symbolise the forces of evil.
- The camp of the saints (9): part of the military imagery of this section. Not to be taken literally. The battle is spiritual.
- Fire from heaven (9): the only weapon mentioned. Fire in the Bible may refer to holiness (e.g., Matt 3:11; Acts 2:3) but it more commonly signifies judgement. Paul speaks of it at the return of Christ (2 Thess 1:7). This represents the postmillennial position of the millennium being the gospel age during which the good news spreads but at the end of which Christ comes. Chapter six depicts

¹⁰ J. Edwards, 'Letter to M. McCulloch', 5 March 1714, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol 1*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984, lxxix.

¹¹ W. Dumbrell, *Revelation: Visions for Today* North Parramatta: Redeemer Baptist Press, 2011, 301.

this—the white horse is the gospel riding through famine and war and death resulting in God's kingdom expanding but many people rebellious to the end (6:12–17).

The Great White Throne (11–15)

This section of chapter 20 describes the day of judgement, using the imagery of a court of law. How that day will actually appear is not clear: it is no doubt indescribable.

- Earth and sky fled (11): necessarily symbolic (of the almighty power of God)
- Small and great (12): prestige, power, possessions all count for nothing
- Books opened (13): legal imagery to describe God's omniscience
- Book of life (13): both Jesus and Paul used this metaphor to describe salvation (Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3). It occurs several times in Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27.)
- Judged by what they had done (12): this statement appears to make good works the basis of acceptance, but in *pneumatikos* terms it is the Lamb's book (13:8; 21:27) and the names of his people have been in it since before creation (13:8; 17:8). Redemption is always by grace (see 3:5).
- Death and Hades thrown into the lake of fire (14): i.e., they will no longer exist
- Name not written (15): in other words, those who have not 'subscribed' to the kingdom.

10–THE NEW JERUSALEM

Read Revelation 21

Chapters 21 and 22 are almost universally taken as a depiction of heaven. There are many aspects that strongly support this view. For example:

- The new Jerusalem is part of a new heaven (21:1)
- There is both a new heaven and a new earth (1) and there is no more sea (1)
- Every tear is wiped away and there is no more pain (4)
- God makes all things new (5)
- The ungodly will not be there (8)
- The new Jerusalem is glorious, radiant, golden, jewel-encrusted (18–21)
- God and the Lamb are its temple (22)
- God is its light (23)
- It is a place of eternal day (26)
- Nothing unclean can enter it (27)
- The river of the water of life is there (22:1)
- There is healing for the nations (2)
- God’s servants will worship him and actually see his face (3, 4)

Much of this imagery is necessarily symbolic and never intended to be taken literally. Some of it is contradictory. For example:

- The city is over 2000 kilometres square, its walls are over 2000 kms high (16) and over 60 metres thick (17).
- The foundations are adorned with jewels (19) necessarily impossibly huge
- The city buildings and street are of pure gold, yet transparent (18)
- Each gate is a single pearl (21) and apparently also 2000 kms high (how big was the oyster!)

Even the most stringent literalist cannot take such expressions at face value. But this is not unusual, not only in Revelation, but in whole the Bible. It is an Eastern book. Hyperbole is common in the OT prophets and poets (e.g., the description of the locusts in Joel chapters one and two; statements such as ‘the mountains will flow with their blood’ and the skies will ‘roll up like a scroll’ (Isaiah 34:3–4). See also Job 41:1–34; Is 55:12; Jer 49:20–22; Ezekiel 38:20).

So, if we must of necessity look for the spiritual truth here, could the new Jerusalem actually depicts how God sees the church? Many would gulp at that. As we see the church now, it is not free from tears and pain. It does not seem to be glorious and radiant. It is nowhere near perfect. These objections can also be raised about much of Paul’s teaching about who we are in Christ. Yet, we need to believe what God says in his Word and confess it by faith. This vision of the New Jerusalem is a great encouragement to do so. Consider the following together with the appropriate new covenant references.¹²

- New earth and heaven (1): compare 2 Cor 5:17, literally, ‘If anyone is in Christ there is a new creation.’
- No more sea: the sea is restless, changeable, the origin of the Monster (13:1), subject to storms. Christ calms the seas of life (Mark 4:39). (No doubt with tongue in cheek, in his poem ‘Heaven’, Poet Rupert Brooke (1887–1915) depicted heaven for fish like this: ‘And in that Heaven of all their wish/There shall be no more land, say fish.’)

¹² Newton offers this as a possible understanding of this chapter and quotes several other writers who argue strongly for it. See J. A., Newton, J., *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021, 377. See also W. Hendriksen, *More the Conquerors*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986 199: “This new and holy Jerusalem is very clearly the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ ...”

- Holy city, Jerusalem (2): Already our dwelling place (Heb 12:22–24)
- God dwelling with us (3); Immanuel = God with us (Is 7:14; Matt 1:23)
- No more tears etc, (4): Is 61:3; Lk 4:18; 2 Cor 5:17
- All things new (5): Is 43:18–19
- Trustworthy and true (5): compare 19:11.
- It is done (6): not the same verb in NT Greek, but similar to that in John 19:30. The work of redemption was finished at the Cross.
- Alpha and Omega (6): the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God is above and beyond time.
- Spring of water (6): John 4:14–15; 7:37–39.
- His God ... my son (7): John 1:12; 1 John 3:1–3
- Cowardly etc: John 3:16; Rom 6:23
- The Bride (9–10): The Bride, 'the wife of the Lamb' is actually the New Jerusalem! Compare Hosea 2:14–23; Ephesians 5:21–32. If it seems strange to call a city a bride, note that Paul also describes the church as a temple (1 Cor 3:16–17; Eph 2:19–22). See also Psalm 48.
- Glory, radiance, jewellery (11–21): the new Jerusalem is dazzling and beautiful. So to Jesus is His church (Song 1:15; 2:13–14; 4:1; Eph 5:25–27).
- Dimensions (12–21): The perfect shape of the city and its wealth and beauty remind us that this is the church in God's eyes.
- No temple (22): The glory of God and the lamp of the Lamb are more than enough. We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6)
- No night (24–25; 22:5): John 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; Eph 5:8; 1 John 1:5–7
- Water of life (22:1): Ezekiel 47:1–6; John 4:14; 7:37–39
- Tree of life (2): for the healing of the nations (prior to the Parousia).
- Throne of God and of the Lamb (3): God is enthroned in his church and Jesus has been highly exalted (Eph 1:15–23; Phil 2:1–11)
- See his face (4): face = presence. Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5–6.
- Name (4): we belong to him. Song 2:16; Eph 1:13.
- God of the spirits of the prophets (6): an encouragement for John to be confident in his words. See the same phrase in 1 Cor 14:32.

Of course, it may well be argued that both these views are true and that the *pneumatikos* Jerusalem of the church is actually a foretaste of that which is to come.

Read Revelation 22

THE SEVEN BLESSINGS

Reading, Hearing and Keeping The Word (7–10)

- Rev 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.
- Rev 14:13 Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!"
- Rev 16:15 Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!
- Rev 19:9 Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."
- Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power.

- Rev 22:7 And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.
- Rev 22:14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

It is worth going over these one by one and applying them by faith to our own lives.

Encouragements

- I fell down (8): For the second time John does this (see 19:10). Given the amazing revelations of the Lamb that John has seen, it is hard to explain why he would consider worshiping another. Gratitude? Respect?
- Do not seal (10): Maybe John was just about to close off his writings. The angel stresses the need to display its contents ASAP.
- Too late now (11). People have made their choices.
- I am coming (12): The words of Jesus. Again, while the gospel is a message of grace, people must still be accountable for their actions, no doubt including the righteous. This statement was future at the time of John's visions: is it included here at the end to suggest that everything in the book was to be fulfilled prior to his Return?
- Alpha and Omega (13): Jesus now uses a phrase hitherto only used in Revelation by God. The implications are obvious. Also, this recalls how often the persons of Almighty God and the Lamb of God are linked together in the Revelation (e.g. 5:13; 6:16; 7:9, 10, 17; 14:4; 21:22; 22:1). There is no doubt in John's mind that the Lamb is God.
- Wash their robes (14): by the blood (7:14)
- Outside (15): Stark language for those who are not in the New Jerusalem/the Church. Consider the varied nature of the sins listed. Are they all equally grievous?
- Jesus (16): both the root (forbear) and descendant of David, exercising royal authority; the bright and morning star, leading the way through the darkness (Is 9:6–7; Lk 1:32).
- Spirit and Bride (17): Holy Spirit and Holy Church both invite us; we are to echo the message.
- The words of this book (18–19): not to be tampered with. A warning to be careful and prayerful with our exegesis.
- Coming soon (20): Soon = without delay. Like John, we respond, 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!' Nothing we may lose by his coming will even come close to all that we will gain.
- Grace: the book ends as it begins, focusing on Jesus. Here the special emphasis is on his grace, the favour that no one deserves but anyone can receive through him.

LOVE IN THE LAMPLIGHT

Read Revelation 2:1–7

Praise

- Good deeds
- Hard work
- Perseverance
- Integrity
- Discernment (re false apostles)
- Endurance (Greek *hupomone*)
- Fortitude
- Holiness—hating the works of Nicolaitans, probably followers of one Nicolaus, who abused Christian grace and liberty by allowing a lax view of idolatry and fornication (see Morris, Newton).

Problem

Initially the Ephesians showed much strong evidence of love

- Courageous love (Acts 19)
- Great love (Eph 3:19)
- Unity (Eph 4:2–3)
- Christ-like love (Eph 4:32; 5:2)
- Practical love (Eph 5:21–33; 6:1–4)
- Robust love (Eph 6:10–20)

Somehow, they had abandoned or rejected this degree of love. Compare Hosea 8:4. They had 'fallen'. Perhaps this loss was not even deliberate.

Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint
Yet I love Thee and adore—
Oh, for grace to love Thee more.

William Cowper (1731–1800)

Prescription

- **Remember** your original enthusiasm (Acts 19, 20).
- **Repent** (*metanoieo*)—change your mind.
- **Repeat**—your own redemption story.

Penalty

- Lampstand = church; place = place of leadership or even near the presence of Jesus? (Revelation chapters 1–3)
- Remove = decline and disappearance of the church.

Promise

- Overcome = overcoming the problem (lost love)
- Tree of life = fruitfulness
- Paradise = Kingdom of God
- To love him more ...

The church must have taken heed of the Lord's rebuke because around thirty years later, en route to Rome where he was martyred, Ignatius wrote to them that their church had 'so endeared itself' to him through their upright nature, marked as it was by faith in Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and by love of him.' He called them 'imitators of God.'

Practical

- What do we need to do to abandon our love for Christ?
- In everyday life what practical things may we do to love someone more?
- How can we apply this to our love for Christ?
- How can we demonstrate our love for Jesus? See Jn 14:15; 1 Jn 3:16–18.

True love depends on communication. How does this apply to our love for Christ?

Finally, consider these stanzas from this well-known song of love for Jesus written in 1862 by William Featherstone. If you are in a group—or even if you are on your own—you may like to sing it now.

My Jesus, I love You, I know You are mine;
For You all the follies of sin I resign.

My gracious Redeemer, my Saviour art Thou
If ever I loved You, my Jesus, 'tis now.

I love You because You have freely loved me,
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree.
I love You for wearing the thorns on Your brow;
If ever I loved You, my Jesus, 'tis now.

William Ralph Featherstone 1862

JESUS OR JEZEBEL?

Read Revelation 2:18–29

Prelude

Thyatira was a small trading city. Morris remarks, 'The longest of the seven letters is written to the smallest and least important town.'¹³ But it was renowned for wool dyeing. It was the hometown of Lydia (Acts 16:14). Jesus is introduced by noting two of the qualities already described in chapter one—prophetic insight and divine authority.

Praise (18, 19)

- Works = *ergon* (c.f. energy)
- Love = *agape*
- Faith = *pistis*
- Service = *diakonia*
- Endurance = *hupomone* i.e., perseverance and hope. 'The heroic will to hold firm' (Hauck).
- Latter works = *ergon* + *eschatos*
- Julia Love: 'Finish well'. See Luke 9:62; Heb 12:1–3

Problem (20–21)

- See 1 Kings 16:31–33
- Woman—or wife? Maybe the pastor's wife?
- False prophecy—1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thess 5:20–22
- Sexual immorality—1 Cor 6:15–20
- Idolatry—1 Cor 8:1–13; 1 John 5:21

Penalty (21–23)

- Sickbed: 1 Cor 11:29–30
- Strike dead: see the parables of Jesus. Matt 11:24–30; 47–50; Lk 12:45.

Prescription (24–25)

- Repent (see verse 20)
- Reject false teaching (even if it seems deep)
- Hold fast = hold strongly
- Josh 1:7–9; Eph 6:10; 1 Cor 16:13.

Promise (27–29)

- Authority = rule, dominion
- Morning star = new day, new life, new kingdom

¹³ L. Morris, *The Revelation of St John in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981, 69.

- Finish well
- Plod with God.

A MATTER OF BLACK AND WHITE

Read Revelation 3:1–6

Prelude (3:16, 20)

Sardis was a rich, commercial city, home of the legendary Croesus, built on a steep, well-fortified hill.

- Seven = perfection
- Stars = source of light and hope
- Angels = messengers (i.e., pastors, leaders. Compare Haggai 1:13; Malachi 2:7)

Praise (1, 4)

- 'Faint praise'
- Garments = character and lifestyle
- Soil = sin. (See ancient inscription: 'Soiled garments disqualify you from temple worship.'

Problem (1, 2)

- Dead/about to die
- Incomplete works
- 'Near enough is not good enough.'

Prescription (2–3, 6)

- Wake up (lit. be awaking).
- Strengthen resolve
- Remember
- Keep (guard, hold fast)
- Repent (change thinking)
- Be ready
- Received = taken, held.
- Heard = and believed (Rom 10:17)
- Tried and true
- New but not novel
- Don't remove the ancient landmarks (Prov 22:28; 23:10–11)
- Listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying (6).

Penalty (3)

- 'I will come against you' = lit. 'upon you'.
- The Lion, not the Lamb.

Promise (4, 5)

- White garments = pure, upright, integrity. See 3:18; 4:4; 7:9, 14; 19:8, 14.
- Confess = acknowledge. See Matt 10:32; Rom 10:10
- Conquer = win victory over sin, the mark of the Monster etc.

The Book of Life

- See Isaiah 4:2; Phil 4:3.
- The register of the redeemed.
- Symbolic of membership in God's kingdom.

- Written by God (compare Col 2:14)
- Suggests freedom, position, acceptance, authority, responsibility
- See also Rev 1:4; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27
- Like a permit to re-enter South Australia!

A New Name in Glory.

I was once a sinner, but I came
Pardon to receive from my Lord.
This was freely given, and I found
That He always kept His word.

Chorus:

There's a new name written down in glory,
And it's mine, oh yes, it's mine!
And the white-robed angels sing the story,
"A sinner has come home"

For there's a new name written down in glory,
And it's mine, oh yes, it's mine!
With my sins forgiven I am bound for heaven,
Nevermore to roam.

Charles Austin Miles (1868–1946)

AN OPEN DOOR

Read Revelation 3:7–13

Prelude (7)

Philadelphia = brotherly love (from *philia* = affection, love; *adelphos* = brother). On his way to martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius, pastor of the Antioch church, wrote to the Philadelphian believers in which he commended them as having 'obtained mercy through love', and being 'established in the harmony of God' and 'rejoicing unceasingly in the passion of our Lord Jesus'.

- **Holy** = set apart, separate, sanctified. See Heb 9:26–27
- True = without error; faithful, having integrity. Genuine, real. John 14:6; 18:37
- Christ is utterly dependable.
- The throne of his father David: Isaiah 9:7
- Jesus, son of David: Matt 1:1; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9
- David's Lord: Acts 2:25; 34–35
- Keys to the kingdom: Matt 16:19
- Isaiah 22:20–24

Eliakim

An unspoken prophetic prototype of Jesus

- Righteousness (robe: Rev 7:14; 19:8)
- Authority (sash: = baldric, Ex 28:8; 2 Sam 20:8; Rev 1:13)
- Compassion (father: Psalm 103:13)
- Government (key of the house of David; Is 9:6–7))
- Security (peg: Is 46:10–11)
- Honour (throne: Is 9:6–7; Lk 1:32)

Praise (8–10)

- (Good) works
- Kept the Word in spite of limitations
- Did not deny the Name
- Patient endurance

Prescription (11)

- Hold fast (see 2:25).
- Crown (*stephanos* as won in Olympic games) = victory, triumph
- Compare losing an Olympic Gold medal.

Promise (8–12)

An Open Door that no-one will shut (7, 8)

- Christ himself is the door (John 10:1)
- To the Kingdom
- To hope, the future, to eternal life
- To victory, peace, salvation and healing
- To ministry (Col 4:3)

Vindication (9, 10)

- Ultimately they will display the true nature of love
- (a) nationally Jews but not spiritually (Gal 3:7–9)
- Or (b) deceptive—Jude
- E.g., social issues apparently compassionate etc, but actually destructive of values etc ...

Deliverance (10).

- Either deliverance from the hour of trial
- Or strength to go through it. See Hebrews 11

Security (12)

- Church = temple (2 Cor 3)
- Pillar = strong part
- Never = no more; absolutely not (lit. not...not)
- A new name
- Name = Person
- Name of God
- Name of city c.f. team uniform
- New Name of Jesus = Saviour, Conqueror etc, Phil 2:11

Two apparently opposite promises

⁸ *I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut ...* ¹² *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it ...*

Which promise do you need to take to yourself at this time?

FURTHER READING

Refer to reliable and reputable Bible commentaries for useful material on the Apocalypse. Some of these may be freely downloaded in programs such as e-Sword, YouVersion, Blue Letter Bible, The Word and the like. Excellent proven commentaries by Alcott, Barnes, Clarke and Jamieson, Faucett and Brown are included in e-Sword and Blue Letter Bible.

Recommended reading

Bingham, G., *The Revelation of St John the Divine*, Blackwood: New Creation Publications, 1992 (This book can be freely downloaded from <http://www.newcreationlibrary.net/books/covers/261.html>)

Chant, B., and Pratney, W., *The Return*, Chichester: Sovereign World, 1988 (currently out of print).

Dumbrell, W., *Revelation: Visions for Today* North Parramatta: Redeemer Baptist Press, 2011.

Hendriksen, W., *More the Conquerors*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986.

Morris, L., *The Revelation of St John*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983

Newton, J., *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021

Newton, J., *Revelation Reclaimed: the Use and Misuse of the Apocalypse*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009.

Supplementary reading

Barclay, W., *The Daily Study Bible: the Revelation of John*, Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1976, 1985.

Bunyan, J., *The Pilgrim's Progress*, London: Oxford University Press, (1678), 1960

Chilton, D., *The Days of Vengeance*, Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987.

Clouse, R., (ed), *The Meaning of the Millennium*, Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977. Edwards, J., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol 1*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984

Grier, W. J., *The Momentous Event*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976.

Grudem, W., *Systematic Theology*, Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011.

Ironside, H. A., *Not Wrath...but Rapture*, Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers.

Konig, A., *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology*, Blackwood, S.A.: New Creation Publications, 1999.

Moffatt, J., *The Revelation of St John the Divine*, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Volume Five, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1967

Swete, H. B., *The Apocalypse of St John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1907.

R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953, 1976, 131.