

Apocalyptic (Arden C. Autry)

"Apocalyptic" is a word that is used in a variety of ways. It can mean a particular viewpoint or way of looking at things, especially an attitude of expecting catastrophic events. It can also be used to describe a certain kind of literature, a genre. That is the way we will use it here—to identify a certain literary genre which was very popular between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. Some of the apocalyptic works from this time are available to us in the pseudepigraphical writings of the intertestamental literature. But two books of the Bible are also known as apocalyptic: Daniel and Revelation. There are also *parts* of other biblical books with apocalyptic features (Isaiah 25-26; Joel 2; Mark 13, etc.).

Apocalyptic literature from the Jewish and early Christian world has *three primary* characteristics:

1. recognition of a dualism of powers--God and Satan; good and evil
2. belief in two distinct ages--this age and the age to come
3. belief in two worlds--the visible and the invisible

Some explanation of each of these characteristics is required, since misunderstanding can happen very easily and with serious consequences for theology.

1. dualism of powers

This is *not* Greek dualism (which is *ontological*, contrasting spirit with matter) but Jewish *ethical* dualism (contrasting good with evil). Neither is this Persian dualism (which tends to make good and evil virtually equal in power). There is never any question in the biblical perspective that Satan and all fallen angels are *created* beings who owe their very existence to God. These created beings have rebelled against their Creator, and, although they may have great power compared to humans, their power is as nothing compared to God's. Therefore, unlike the *absolute* dualism of Persian Zoroastrianism, biblical apocalyptic literature is *modified* dualism. Jewish apocalyptic is thus described as *modified, ethical* dualism.

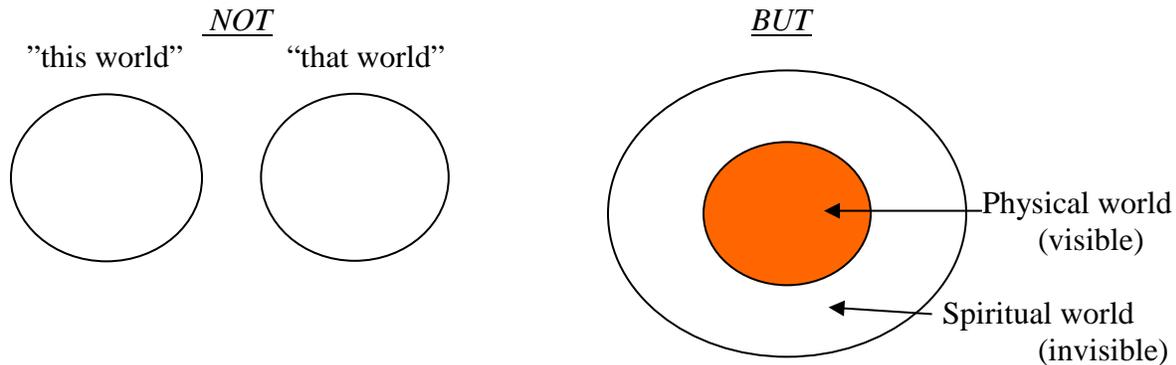
2. two distinct ages

The emphasis here is on the qualitative difference between this age (which is under the influence of the evil rebellion) and the age to come (when all rebellion will have ended and salvation will be complete). Apocalyptic literature tends to emphasize that the new age comes only with the catastrophic end of the present age. In this respect, apocalyptic has a different tone than the related prophetic genre.

Prophetic literature mostly presents the future as dependent on the faithful lives of God's people in the present; the future "grows" out of the present and depends on human obedience. Apocalyptic presents the future salvation as coming totally under the sovereignty of God; the future cannot "grow" out of the present because it is so totally different from the present. Prophetic literature emphasizes human responsibility in bringing about a better world; apocalyptic tends to make us feel that there is not much we can do but hold on until God comes! If we take these two perspectives together, we can have a healthy balance: *we are responsible* for making the world a better place, where God's will can be done, but ultimately we depend on the *intervention of God* to bring the degree of salvation which we really need.

3. two worlds

It is very important to emphasize that the two worlds are not like Earth and Mars. Rather what is meant here is the distinction between the visible, physical realities and the invisible, spiritual realities. We do not leave one world to go to the other, because we are in both worlds all the time.



Furthermore, what happens in the visible world is connected to happenings and forces in the unseen world, and vice versa. The events of the physical world—political, economic, military—are seen in connection with the conflict in the spiritual world. (The Book of Daniel shows this perspective clearly, especially in 10:12-14.) The events of the visible world are therefore spiritually significant. Thus we are not looking at a gnostic kind of fascination with the "real" world of the spirit; rather, we are being presented with the spiritual "insight" into the meanings and causes of things in the world we inhabit every day. This perspective is at the heart of apocalyptic, for the very word "apocalyptic" means "unveiling." The apocalyptic writer has been allowed to see what is ordinarily not seen, and thus he can bring us insight to help us in the struggles of being God's people in this physical world and in this age.

On a practical level, this perspective can help us understand that we were born on a battle field (not a playground). Whether we are aware of it or not, we live daily in a conflict zone. We don't have to go somewhere else to be in the spiritual realm; we're already there (see Eph. 6:10ff.).

Secondary characteristics of apocalyptic literature

The features usually noticed first by the reader of apocalyptic include the frequent use of standard symbols. The following are often used, both in Daniel and Revelation and in the non-canonical apocalyptic books:

- beasts--often represent nations or empires
- horns--usually represent individual kings or warriors
- stars--can be used to represent angels, or perhaps powerful men

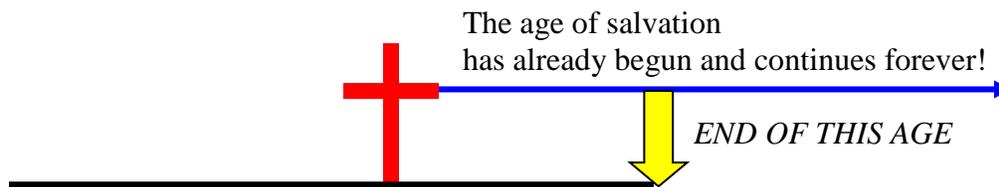
Certain numbers, such as 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 70, etc. are frequently used, as are colors. Another common feature of apocalyptic literature is the angelic interpreter who explains to the writer what he is seeing. I call these characteristics “secondary” because they are surface features

(frequently found but not always). In contrast the "primary" characteristics identified earlier are basic to the outlook presented in apocalyptic literature (and also in the Bible in general).

Without apocalyptic there would be no clear picture of the ultimate end of history, of final judgment, etc. (Since the end of history is by definition beyond our present experience, it is not surprising that it is expressed in such highly symbolic language and images.)

With apocalyptic alone there would be no clear picture of the difference we can make now, of the responsibility we have to try to make the world more like what God wants it to be.

The incarnation of Christ makes a radical difference in the Christian view of apocalyptic, because *the new has come into the old*. The new is present even in the midst of the old. The new era has begun even though we still struggle with the problems of the old era. The presence of the new era, the kingdom of God, empowers us in the conflict and assures us of the ultimate outcome. Our business is not just waiting; it is healing. Jesus said that we should "occupy" until he comes; he did not say to be "pre-occupied" with the timing of the Second Coming.



The present age continues until its end.

Jesus Opens the Book

In Revelation 5:1-5, we find the following words:

Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; ²and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" ³And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁴And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

We cannot provide full commentary on this text, but this picture of Jesus is appropriate to recall at this point. This passage presents Jesus as the only one with the authority to "open the book" (called "scroll" in the NRSV) by opening its "seven seals." Many different opinions exist with regard to the seven seals (especially whether they represent future events), but one point should be indisputable—Jesus is Lord over the unfolding of history. Whatever the future holds, ultimately his purposes will prevail.

Only Jesus can open "the book" of destiny. That is true for us individually and for the whole world. Neither we nor the world will ever fulfill our God-given purpose apart from

Christ. No one else can "open the book," for "the book" is written by God. No authority less than God's can open it, fully interpret it, or fulfill its contents. As long as the book remains sealed, its contents unknowable, there is cause to weep (vs. 4). But when we see that Jesus opens the book, we can join those in heaven who sing to him who alone fulfills the destiny for which we were created and redeemed:

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God,
and they will reign on earth. [Rev. 5:9-10]

The Book of Revelation
A Lesson Series by
R. Wade Paschal, PhD
Edited by Arden C. Autry, PhD

Lesson 1, Introduction and Chapter 1

Lesson 2, Letters to the Churches (chapters 2-3)

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Lesson 7, Judgment on Babylon (chapters 15-18)

Lesson 8, Marriage Supper of the Lamb (chapters 19-22)

Recommended Resource: M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Revelation: Holy Living in an Unholy World*. Francis Asbury Press, Zondervan Publishing, 1990.

Note from the editor: Where I have added any significant amount of material to Dr. Paschal's lessons, I have identified it with my initials: ACA.

The Book of Revelation
Lesson 1
Introduction and Chapter 1

Background

The book of Revelation is a book of apocalyptic visions. There is a difference between apocalyptic and prophecy. We can see this if we look at a typical Messianic prophecy out of Isaiah, and the opening vision of Christ in Revelation 1:

Isaiah 9:2-6 (New Revised Standard Version)

- ² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep
darkness—
on them light has shined.
- ³ You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
- ⁴ For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of
Midian.
- ⁵ For all the boots of the tramping
warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
- ⁶ For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Revelation 1:13-19 (NRSV)

¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. ¹⁴ His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. ¹⁹ Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.”

Note the differences between the two. The prophetic statement from Isaiah looks forward to the time God will act **on earth** to change history. The apocalyptic statement from Revelation looks to what is happening **in heaven**. The prophetic statement speaks in terms of human history, the apocalyptic speaks in terms of the heavenly spectacle. There is a link between prophecy and apocalyptic: both speak of the future. But prophecy looks at the future in terms of the action of God on earth through human events. Apocalyptic interprets the future as a result of the playing out of the heavenly drama. Jesus in the prophetic account has all the titles of a great king. In the apocalyptic account, Jesus is a divine figure with the “keys of Death and of Hades.”

To look at it another way, prophecy seeks to draw people to God through calling the people to obedience by pointing out the results of their actions: disobedience bringing judgment and obedience bringing blessing. Apocalyptic, however, seeks a direct vision of God, trying to make sense of the present turmoil by gaining an insight into what is happening on the heavenly plane of events. The assumption in apocalyptic is that what happens in heaven is the mirror—in a greater sense the cause—of what happens on earth.

Another difference is that prophecy *tends* to be strictly an event of hearing the word of God, while apocalyptic is both a visual and hearing event. In Jeremiah 14:17, the Lord speaks to Jeremiah and says, “You shall say to them this word...” Isaiah 8:11 reads, “For the Lord spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people.” Contrast this with: “Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter” (Revelation 1:19, RSV). The emphasis on seeing is critical in apocalyptic literature in a way that is not quite so prevalent in prophetic literature. Images are present in prophetic literature: one thinks of the broken flask and basket of figs in Jeremiah. However, even there the images are decidedly earthbound and normal. The images are interpreted prophetically, but they are not heavenly visions.

Apocalyptic literature is just as decidedly heavenly oriented. The whole of apocalyptic is the stuff of visions, and what one sees in the vision is fantastic and beyond human experience. In this sense apocalyptic visions are often somewhat guarded about what they say in these visions. Notice the restraint in this example from Ezekiel 1:22-28, as he uses expressions such as “likeness,” “like,” “as it were,” and “appearance” to describe what he saw:

Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of a firmament, shining like crystal, spread out above their heads. And under the firmament their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another; and each creature had two wings covering its body. And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of a host; when they stood still, they let down their wings. And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads; when they stood still they let down their wings.

And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne in appearance like sapphire, and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire and enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking

Ezekiel is one of the classic prophets, and much of Ezekiel reads like regular prophecy. Yet we see in Ezekiel the beginning of apocalyptic. In his vision of the Glory of God (quoted above) he anticipates the great apocalyptic visionary scenes. Prophets were often called “seers” because their prophetic inspiration began in visions. Yet, again, ultimately Ezekiel's prophecy

will deal directly with what will happen on earth. True apocalyptic, like the apocalyptic portions in Daniel, sees the heavenly plane and not the earthly.

What caused the rise of apocalyptic?

There are several things that seem to make apocalyptic a significant form:

- 1) Apocalyptic thrives in times of trouble and persecution.
- 2) Apocalyptic gives hope in troubled times by showing that what does not make sense here, does make sense when viewed on the heavenly plane.
- 3) Apocalyptic speaks in veiled terms so that political foes will not be offended.
- 4) Apocalyptic warns that faithfulness now is of eternal significance.

The question that we have to deal with as we look at this material is "how do we understand these visions?" Tim LaHaye in his book, *Revelation Illustrated and Made Plain*, talks about the "Golden Rule of Interpretation": "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate text, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise." This is a good rule, but one that LaHaye himself breaks within five pages. Plus, when you are talking about heavenly visions, what does it mean to talk about "primary, ordinary, usual, literal" meanings? The whole nature of apocalyptic is the unusual, the non-ordinary, and the superlative. The question is, "What is literal for a vision of heaven?"

There is a sense, as we saw in Ezekiel, that the last thing a person seeing a vision of heaven wants his reader to do is to take him literally in a physical sense. The visionary is seeing heaven, and all human words and experiences are at best approximations of heavenly reality. This is not to say that physical reality is "real" and the vision is "unreal." Indeed, from the apocalyptic point of view, the heavenly reality is the first reality of which our history is but a shadow or reflection.

What we will do as we study Revelation is to look at the whole scope of apocalyptic literature in order to understand how visions and the stuff of visions are meant to be seen and interpreted, at least as best we can understand them. We will attempt to give as much "fair play" to competing understandings of the material as we can. But, in the end we will have to make decisions about what this material means and why we think what we think.

Historical Background

Author

Who wrote Revelation? Well, we know it was someone named "John" who was known by the churches in Asia. Traditionally, this was John the apostle, the brother of James and writer of the gospel by the same name, and the three letters of John. There has been some doubt over this assignment, however, even as far back as the third century. The reasons for doubt are as follows:

- 1) Although the author of the letter is identified as "John," this is a very common name.
- 2) The style, grammar and concepts used in Revelation are very different from the gospel. These are not small differences, but major differences.
- 3) There is some evidence that there were two major figures named "John" connected

with the church in Asia Minor. It is not clear, however, how that second John, if he did exist, would have the authority to have a book like Revelation that would be accepted as Scripture.

Another alternative is that John the apostle is the authority behind both gospel and Apocalypse, but in a different manner in each. The book of Revelation looks like a book written by a Jewish Christian who thought in Hebrew as he wrote in Greek. The Gospel of John clearly claims apostolic authority for its message. Just as clearly there were other disciples who vouched for that authority. (See John 21:23, "This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true." But obviously the writer of 21:23 is not the beloved disciple.) Perhaps the Gospel of John represents the teaching of John preserved by his disciples, while the Revelation of John represents the writing of John himself.

Date

There are only two major candidates for dating the book: 68 AD (during the reign of Nero, who persecuted the church) and about 95 AD (during a similar persecution under Domitian). Tradition favors the 95 date. The reference to a succession of emperors ("kings") in Revelation 17 fits best with the date around 68.

Read 1:1-3, Introduction.

How does the introduction explain the book? Who is the real writer of the book? What is the purpose given?

First, the book makes it clear that the human author's identity (see above) is in some sense irrelevant. This is not really John's revelation, but "the revelation of Jesus Christ." This is a revelation from God, from Christ through John. John is merely the witness of the revelation and not the giver of the revelation. The purpose of the revelation was to witness to the word of God and the witness of Jesus. Those who hear and do according to the wisdom of this vision are to be blessed by God.

From whom does John bring greetings in his salutation in 1:4-5?

"Who was and is and is to come" echoes back to "I am that I am" (Exodus 3:14). Also Deuteronomy 32:29 in the LXX (Septuagint, Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) reads, "I am he who is, and who was, and I am he who will be." "To come" puts emphasis on the final judgment and acts of history which are coming.

What is meant by "The seven spirits"? Some say this refer to the "spirits" of the churches, but the angels of the church seem to do that. Others connect this with Isaiah 11:2, "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom, and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety; by this spirit he shall be filled with the fear of the Lord." So, the Spirit is seen as a "sevenfold" Spirit.

Dr. L. D. Thomas (pastor of this church from the late 60s through the mid-80s) connected this "sevenfold" nature of the Spirit with the seven gifts of the Spirit listed in Romans 12, thus emphasizing the enabling nature of the Holy Spirit.

Another idea connects the Spirit with the Menorah and with Zechariah 4. In Zechariah 4 the prophet sees a vision of seven lamps, and the meaning of this vision is given in vs. 6: "This is

the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

The number seven is always a significant number for Revelation, symbolizing the full and complete will of God. So, here the reference to the Holy Spirit as seven spirits no doubt represents the fullness of the Spirit's work.

Finally we have a description of Jesus. He is called the "faithful witness" (vs. 5). This reminds us of the Gospel of John where Jesus claims only to have given the disciples the words that the Father has given him (so 17:6-8).

Then he is the "firstborn of the dead" (Rev. 1:5). Jesus' resurrection is proclaimed and the fact that his resurrection is a promise of our own resurrection. Finally, Jesus is proclaimed as "the ruler of kings on the earth," which follows the idea of Philippians 2 that "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." The reign of Jesus over earthly powers is important for the church being oppressed by those powers in the interim.

Then we find in the blessing of verse 5b and following a further description of Jesus' work. He is the one who "loves us". This is again key—to have the love of the King is the best thing that can happen to a subject. Jesus does care for us.

Note also that we are "freed from our sins by his blood." The sacrifice of Jesus was meant to free us and lead us into forgiveness. On the one hand, this imagery sees the individual without Jesus as trapped and held prisoner by sin. The true prisons are not the political prisons of the earthly powers, but the prison of the soul in sin. Jesus liberates us from this prison.

What is the work of Jesus according to 1:6-7? What is the promise of Jesus in vs. 7? How does Jesus identify himself?

Jesus also makes us a kingdom and priests to God. We are not a lost and lonely people, but a kingdom. We have the hallowed role of priests in that kingdom, to serve and to praise God. Moreover, John tells us that Jesus is "coming on the clouds"; this recalls Daniel 7:13, where the vision is not of the son of Man, but of God coming. Already, Jesus is beginning to claim some of the prerogatives of God. Note the connection with Philippians 2 again.

Then God proclaims, "I am the Alpha and the Omega"—the beginning and end letters of the Greek alphabet. It suggests the summing up of all things in God, who has now revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

What does John's vision of Jesus tell us in 1:12-17?

Note a comparison between this vision of Jesus in Revelation 1 and another vision of the OT:

¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; ¹⁴ his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; ¹⁶ in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last," ¹⁸ and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter. (Revelation 1:13-19, RSV)

⁵ I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with gold of Uphaz. ⁶ His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the noise of a multitude. ⁷ And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. ⁸ So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. ⁹ Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground. (Daniel 10:5-9, RSV)

Note how much of the visions of Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 10 are now applied to Jesus. The bronze appearance, the white hair, the flaming eyes, and the loud voice are all out of these theophanic visions. What does this mean?

Note in Daniel 10 the same phenomena now applied to an angel. In Daniel 10 the material is meant to suggest that through the angel some of the invisible God's character is communicated to Daniel. Now, the same idea is applied to the man Jesus. So that, Jesus (at least the resurrected and ascended Jesus) is not simply a man, but the revelation of the glory of God.

In his hands Jesus holds seven stars, which will correspond to the seven churches. This means the life of the various churches are in the hand of Jesus. The two-edged sword coming out of his mouth represents the power of Jesus' word which is the power of judgment.

John falls on his face; this is what one does before God. But Jesus reassures him, "I am the first and the last, and the living one." Again Jesus is taking up the titles of God (Alpha and Omega, I AM, see vss. 4 and 8 above). This continues to emphasize that the plan of God and the actions of Jesus are one. Jesus is the living one who died and lives now forever. That is what God has to offer those who are faithful to Jesus—eternal life and victory over death. Therefore, the present problems and conflicts are not ultimate for the believer.

Verses 19-20 explain John's purpose (to write what he witnesses), as he begins to interpret what he has already seen. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. The lampstands are the churches. So John is to witness a word from the Lord to these churches. The promise is that this is not a mere earthly word, but the very power of the God.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 2

Revelation 2 and 3

The Letters to the Churches (Revelation 2-3)

Purpose: In this lesson we will look at the "letters" written to the seven churches. In particular we will note (and reject) the common dispensationalist understanding of the letters. In its place we will study the common structure of the letters and the key themes—namely the need for faithfulness and perseverance in the churches through persecution and testing.

Why write letters to the 'angels' of the churches?

Angels are the key actors in the book of Revelation because the "action" of the book is in heaven. For other passages involving angels see 7:1; 8:1ff; 10:1ff; - 12:7ff; 14:6-13; 14:17-20; 16:1ff; 20:1ff) . In the OT angels were often connected with a nation—the action of the angel in heaven represented the actions of a particular nation on earth (see Daniel 7).

Now, in Rev. 2-3, each angel represents a church in a particular city. The basic idea is that what happens in heaven in the angelic realm controls or affects what happens on earth. By addressing the "angel" of the church, Jesus is still addressing the church, but recognizing that what is going on is a cosmic struggle and drama, not just a human, historical event.

Does the number "seven" have any significance?

For Dispensationalists the number "seven" means that there is a symbolic significance to the churches. They see the seven churches as representing seven ages of church history:

- Ephesus, apostolic age (only in this church are the apostles mentioned).
- Smyrna, church under persecution (only here is persecution mentioned)
- Pergamum, the church under Constantine (when paganism began to infiltrate the church)
- Thyatira, the church in the catholic period (when 'worship of Mary' began and the mass was seen as a sacrifice)
- Sardis, the post-reformation church
- Philadelphia, the faithful church
- Laodicea, the lukewarm church

Some problems with this approach:

1. The number seven appears frequently in this book, but only here do people try to tie this to periods of church history (cf. seven seals, seven bowls of wrath, seven trumpets, etc.) What in the text supports this notion that seven periods of time are indicated? Nothing we can see.
2. The connection between the Ephesus letter and the apostles is purely negative! This is a pretty slim basis for representing the entire apostolic age!

3. The attempt to connect the problem of Jezebel at Thyatira with the role of Mary is Catholicism is unconvincing. Other than the fact that both were women, there is no further similarity.
4. All the supposedly “post-reformation” churches (Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea) have characteristics common to churches of every age, not just post-reformation churches.

In point of historical fact, there really were seven churches in these cities, which on the map connect together by road in a roughly circular route. The easiest way to explain the seven letters, is that the Revelation was originally circulated among all the churches in the area for their edification. And the seven letters were written to real churches with the problems described in these letters (in short, take it as written).

The number "7" is significant in the book of Revelation, and usually suggests perfection or completeness. It may well be that the list of seven churches made another, secondary point—that this letter was the "complete" story God wanted to send to the whole church.

All the letters to the churches have a similar structure:

Address
Description of Sender
Commendation
Warning
 [sometimes further commendation]
Command to hear

"To him who conquers"—condition of promise
Promise

The letters change or delete some of these parts, but most have this basic outline.

The **Description of the Sender** emphasizes something about Jesus that is significant to the situation or needs of the particular church. For Ephesus this emphasizes Jesus as the one in charge of the future of the church. For Smyrna, Jesus is described in terms of his resurrection; in Pergamum Jesus holds the sword of judgment.

Commendation: Most churches are doing something right, and they are commended for it. Only Sardis and Laodicea receive virtually no commendation.

Condemnation: Various problems face the churches.

Ephesus—lost their first love
Smyrna—none
Pergamum—have accepted the false teaching of the Nicolaitans (which might mean they were teaching it was ok for Christians to participate in pagan worship)
Thyatira—in a city with very strong trade guilds, a woman named "Jezebel" (see I Kings 19:1ff) had arisen, giving the Thyatiran church bad advice—probably encouraging them to participate in pagan rites and worship services.
Sardis—they are dead in their faith—a bad case of spiritual rot.

Philadelphia—none

Laodicea—they are neither hot or cold (near Laodicea a spring with lukewarm and limestone water would literally make a drinker throw up!)

Warning

Ephesus—remember your first love

Smyrna—do not fear the coming persecution, but endure it as a trial

Pergamum—repent

Thyatira—"Jezebel" must repent or be struck by God. The church must repent or face similar judgment.

Sardis—suffers from self-satisfaction, but God is not satisfied. If they do not wake up, God will wake them up with judgment!

Philadelphia—hold on to what you have

Laodicea—seek the true riches of faith in God

Promise

Ephesus—"he who conquers"—overcoming is key to receiving God's promise in every case. For Ephesus, the promise relates to the Genesis promise of the tree of life. For those who keep their first love, the "first life" of Creation is theirs!

Smyrna—"He who conquers will not be hurt by the second death."

Pergamum—to receive the hidden manna and the white stone with a new name on it.

Pagans believed that stones with divine names provided protection, but real protection comes with Jesus.

Thyatira—those who are faithful will judge the unfaithful and will be with Christ.

Sardis—will be clothed in 'white garments'—become part of the citizens in heaven.

Philadelphia—will be a pillar in God's temple, part of God's house.

Laodicea—Jesus is ready to come in and renew fellowship with those who invite him.

One suggestion for teaching this lesson: divide the class up and have a group (or groups) discuss each letter. Have them identify for each church the parts of the letter as listed above, and then share back with the class. [ACA: The class as a whole or in groups could discuss how these commendations, warnings, promises, etc. apply to our church or to the churches in America.]

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 3

Revelation 4 and 5

The Heavenly Worship of God and the Lamb

Revelation 4 and 5 begin a new vision sequence centering around the heavenly throne room and the worship going on there.

What happens in 4:1?

Some have tried to connect 4:1, "Come up here," with the rapture of the church (see 1 Thess. 4:17, "Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we always be with the Lord"). The action in Rev. 4:1, however, involves John alone, not the whole church (the verb and pronouns are singular).

What we have here is the ascent of a visionary to the heavenly throne room—an idea found in many places in Jewish literature.

2 Enoch 3:1-4:1: "And it came about ... the men called me. And they took me up onto their wings, and carried me up to the first heaven. And they put me down there. They led before my face the elders, the rulers of the stellar orders."

1 Enoch 14:24-25: "And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, "Come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy Word, And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I continued to look down with my face."

The "open heaven" and the trip of the prophet into heaven gave the prophet insight and understanding so that he could help those still on earth interpret the times and remain faithful. Revelation 4:1 has its closest NT parallel in Paul's reference to his own heavenly revelations (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-4). There he talks about being "caught up to the third heaven." or the highest heaven where the throne of God is. Paul does not share the content of this experience, and he is not sure if he went there bodily or spiritually, but it was a powerful experience.

The point is that Revelation 4-5 gives us a vision of God's throne room. This means John will learn the inner secrets of God and how to understand the present troubles facing the church. So Rev. 4:1 is not a reference to the rapture, but pretty standard language for a visionary experience.

What is the significance of the vision of the throne? (4:2-11)

Much of the language here parallels Ezekiel 1, but with echoes also from Exodus and Isaiah:

throne vs. 2/Ezekiel 1:26

likeness on the throne vs. 2/Ezekiel 1:26

appearance of jasper and carnelian vs. 3/ Exodus 28:18 (high priest's breastplate)

rainbow vs. 3/Ezekiel 1:28

emerald vs. 3/Exodus 28:18 (high priest's breastplate)

lightning vs. 5/Ezekiel 1:4, 14, 27

thunder vs. 5/Ezekiel 1:24

four creatures vs. 6/Ezekiel 1:5

six wings vs. 8/Isaiah 6:2; Ezekiel 1:6 (4 wings)

The throne in apocalyptic literature is the dwelling place of God. The throne represents on the one hand God's kingship and judgment. What comes in the following chapters will express the judgment of God. At the same time, the throne also represent the temple of heaven. The temple in Jerusalem was seen as an earthly copy of the heavenly temple. As people worshipped on earth, they joined in the heavenly worship. The connections with Isaiah 6 and Exodus 28 underline the importance of the worship here.

John's vision begins with the throne of God, because that is where true knowledge begins—with the worship and experience of God (Proverbs 9:10).

Compare and Contrast Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.

Isaiah 6:3 gives us the "Trisagion" (three-fold "holy") in this form: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Revelation 4:8 reads, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

Isaiah 6 emphasizes the earth as the place of the revelation of God's glory. The message of Isaiah focuses on what God intends for earthly history. Revelation 4:8 focuses on the eternity of God. God's being and purpose are always the same and eternal.

In a sense this gives us a good contrast between the purpose of prophetic literature (which deals with God's will in earthly history) and apocalyptic literature (which looks at the heavenly world in order to make sense of the earthly). The problem that prompts apocalyptic literature is that what is happening on earth makes no sense if God is loving and all-powerful. The unsaid question is, "Is God inconsistent or out of control?" Revelation 4:8 declares the consistency of God. If we can see things from the heavenly perspective, we will see how God is consistent and working his will through history.

Who are the twenty-four elders and what is their role?

The twenty-four elders are an interesting number. Normally, you would expect twelve, for the twelve tribes of Israel. The twenty-four probably reflects the addition of the twelve apostles.

We see the elders in worship—the only possible reaction of people in the presence of God. You see God's worthiness (cf. Isa. 6) against our creatureliness. The elders have crowns, indicating their own royalty, but these they cast before God, who alone is worthy of praise. God is the creator and all things come from God.

In short, between the worship of the elders and the Trisagion of the four creatures, the sufficiency and majesty of God are emphasized. In the midst of crisis, God is still on his throne and ruling over all creation.

Chapter 5—The Lamb and the Scroll

What is the significance of the scroll?

In the OT, scrolls are connected with the inspiration of the prophet (see Ezek 3:1-3; Jer 15:16; in reference to judgment see Jer 36:1-3; Zech 5:1-4; Ezek 2:8-10). This may also be a

reference to the sealed book of Dan 12:1-4, indicating that Revelation sees itself as a continuation of Daniel.

Several interpretations of the scroll have been given:

- a deed of covenant describing damages due God if humanity break the covenant
- a will, leaving the earth to believers
- an announcement of the establishment of God's kingdom (see 11:15)

The opening of the scroll leads to judgment, but also to God's kingdom coming on earth.

Who is the Lamb and what is the significance of the Lamb?

Notice the description of the Lamb in v5—this is a messianic description (cf. Gen. 49:9; Isa. 11:1-2; Zech. 6:12), indicating the Lamb is the messianic king of Israel.

The Lamb appears with seven eyes and seven horns (the later explicitly linked with the Spirit of God). Jesus is called by John the Baptist "one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8 and parallels, especially John 1:29-34, which also mentions Jesus as God's Lamb). The Spirit-endowment of the Lamb means that he acts in God's power and knowledge.

The figure of the lamb is important in all of Scripture. The lamb is offered in sacrifice (Gen 22:7; Ex 12:5 [Passover]; Lev 5: 6, 15 and others). In the NT Jesus is connected with the figure of a lamb in John 1: 29 and 1 Cor 5:7.

The sacrificial function of the Lamb is highlighted in the greeting the heavenly host give the lamb:

"Worthy art thou to take the scroll and open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe" (Rev. 5:9).

But note that there is more to the Lamb than a sacrifice for sin. In 5:10 we read that the Lamb has "made [of people] a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth." The Lamb not only sacrifices himself as a sin-offering for others; he also establishes a community. This community has the functions of offering worship for God and establishing God's reign on earth.

In short the Lamb is not just sacrifice, but Messiah and Lord.

In 5:12-13 we see the lamb praised in words much like those sung to God on the throne. Compare 5:12-13 and 4:11. God and the Lamb are now praised as co-regents of the Kingdom. The Lamb is going to be most connected with God's kingdom on earth.

How can we summarize the significance of this scene?

1. The scene sets up the character of God as eternal and in control.
2. The Lamb provides both forgiveness for sins and a promise of God's rule on earth.
3. We are reminded that truly to know God means we must fall in worship before God.

4. We are told that God is about to reveal to us through the Lamb the secrets of the scroll.
5. We are promised that God is not only in heaven, but is also about to work His will on earth and to establish his community of priests and his kingdom.

[Additional note from the editor, ACA: The scenes of heavenly worship in Rev. 4-5, taken together, emphasize God's roles as Creator and Redeemer. The same One who created the earth and all humanity is the One who (in the sacrifice of the Lamb) redeems people from all over the earth to be his kings and priests **on earth**.

The Creator who is the Redeemer (or the Redeemer who is the Creator) serves also to contrast with the gnostic tendency to imagine that the Redeemer saves us from creation (from physical matter into a purely spiritual environment). In contrast the Bible (OT and NT) consistently portrays God as both Creator and Redeemer. Just as Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth." He did not teach us to pray, "Take us to a place where your will is already being done."]

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 4

Revelation 6-9

The Seven Seals and Seven Trumpets

6:1-11—What does the Lamb do with the seals? What is the meaning of his action? What is the meaning of each seal? [As you can, read the rest of the chapter and finish the first six seals.]

Mulholland suggests, "If the scroll represents the fullness of the purposes God is working out in history, the seals suggest the parameters within which God's purposes are carried out." The Lamb is releasing the plan of God for the world, and each seal represents a tool in that plan.

A big question here: is this a *chronology*? That is, are we looking at things that are supposed to happen one after another in a time sequence? Or, are we looking at *types* or *kinds* of events that are organized like with like, without reference to chronology?

Note that each seal has a figure or figures and actions connected with it:

Seal 1—The White rider/bow/to conquer. Who is this white rider?

Some (Mulholland) have said CHRIST, due to the similarity between this figure and the figure (who is clearly Christ) in chapter 19. I do not think so, however. Christ is the one opening the seal. Although it is not impossible in an apocalyptic vision for Christ also to be the content of one of the seals, it seems clumsy. More significantly to me, the first four seals all have figures on horses that are particular colors. If we cannot name the following three figures, why do we feel we must or should give a particular name to the first? The failure to treat the white rider here like the others is also the reason why I doubt this is meant to be the ANTI-CHRIST. I prefer to see the white horse as HUMAN INFATUATION WITH POWER—THE POWER WHICH MANIPULATES AND RULES THE WORLD. The anti-Christ is the ultimate image of this power, but all such power threatens the faithful.

Seal 2—Red horse/slaying with the sword.

This is an image of war—some would connect it with civil war. But the key emphasis is that he takes "peace from the earth." The red horse takes the desire for power and to conquer symbolized in the white horse one step further: the desire for power justifies slaying your enemies. This rider, perhaps, represents the removal of barriers that hold back human hatred and the desire for revenge. Peace is a God-given virtue—lose this virtue and the evils of war make us less than human (think of all the wars today, as well as those in the past).

Seal 3—Black horse/balance/lack of grain.

The balance represents the lack of grain so that goods must be carefully weighed out. The plenty of oil and wine may suggest that the basics are scarce, but luxuries are still available. The poor, as usual in war and upheaval, will suffer most from the problems. The black horse represents another downward step—the desire for power leads to conflict, which leads to murder and death, which leads to economic want and hardship, especially for the poor and weak.

Seal 4—Pale horse/Death/killing with sword, pestilence, famine, wild beasts.

Horse four doesn't quite fit with the first three as an independent "step" but seems to be a culmination of the first three. Death reaps the results of human greed for power, the awfulness of war, and the want that comes with it.

Seal 5—Saints under the altar, crying to God.

These are the martyrs who die for their faith. We are not told when they were slain. There is no suggestion that there is any difference between "witnesses" mentioned earlier in 2:12 or 1:2—these are not necessarily post-rapture martyrs but all martyrs. The prayers of the faithful in apocalyptic literature are typically tied to the altar. Here the martyrs are asking God how long God will let the downward process go on? What is the purpose of this destruction? The martyrs are told to rest and wait a while. Their desire for justice and for all the evil to make "sense" is accepted. History will make sense, but only in God's time. Note their white garments—this is the color of heaven but also of the priesthood. The martyrs are given a priestly role, praying for God's people, and their prayers are heard.

Seal 6—The day of wrath. This begins the judgment for which the saints have been praying. Note parallels between Rev. 6:12ff and Mark 13:

Rev 6	Mark 13
earthquake	earthquake (vs. 8)
sun black	sun darkened (vs. 24)
moon as blood	moon dark (vs. 24)
stars fall	stars fall (vs. 25)
sky vanishes	heavens shake (vs. 25)
all hide	Son of Man gathers elect (Lk 21:21)

Mark 13 and Revelation 6 both describe the Day of Judgment. God is about to loose his terrible judgment!

Read 7:1-4, 13-17

Who are the 144,000 and what is their significance?

Revelation 7 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. Here the main point is the appearance of the 144,000 in heaven (12,000 from each tribe of Israel). Who are these people?

Some see them as Jews saved in the time of tribulation.
 Jehovah's Witnesses see them as the people who are saved and actually get to "live" in heaven.

Some see the number as symbolic of the "full" salvation of Israel
 (12 x 12 x 10 x 10—all "numbers of completion or perfection").

Some see this as representing the full salvation of the church

(being the replacement of Israel).

A few clues: the twelve tribes list Joseph in place of Ephraim and leave out Dan altogether—so this is not a simple reference to the normal twelve tribes of Israel. The best choices are that either the full salvation of Israel or the church is in view here. I tend toward Israel, based on Jeremiah 23:3 and other Scriptures that promise God will have a faithful remnant in Israel. The numbers mean that God's saving grace is large, not small (God will not get to 144,000 and cut people off).

Note what the people say: SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LAMB. Whether Christian or Jewish, Christ gets the praise.

7:13-17 tells us these are those who have died because of their faith. They now serve Christ in the heavenly temple, and all their tribulations and pains have been cured. In short, the faithful will find rest and restoration after their persecution.

Read 8:1-6.

What happens when the seventh seal is opened?

With the seventh seal, there is a time of silence in heaven—as if we are waiting for something great to happen. An angel burns incense on the altar. Incense was burned in the temple as an act of prayer, but also as an act of atonement and repentance (see Lev. 16:12-13). The burning of incense purifies the High Priest on the Day of Atonement before he enters the Holy of Holies. This is a similar act of purification in preparation for serving God.

The rest of chapters 8-9 covers the seven trumpets the angels blow. The trumpets parallel the action of the seven seals and do not necessarily describe additional events of wrath. What we have here is another interpretation of the wrath of God and the time of judgment. Note, too, the parallel between the trumpets and the plagues sent in Egypt against Pharaoh:

Trumpet 1/hail = 7th plague (hail), Ex 9:23-26

Trumpet 2/seas defiled = 1st plague (Nile defiled), Ex 7:20-26

Trumpet 3/bitter waters = Waters of Marah, Ex 15:22

Trumpet 4/darkness = 9th plague, Ex 10:21

Trumpet 5/locusts and scorpions = 8th plague, Ex 10:4ff

Trumpet 6/4 angels kill 1/3 of mankind = 10th plague (firstborn killed, Ex 12:29ff)

The parallels are striking, but don't miss the differences: not all plagues find their parallel here, and the details of each differ significantly. If there is a connection, it's that pagans are being called to repent as Pharaoh was, and are refusing to do so and receiving judgment in return.

On trumpet 5, notice that the star is probably an angel (Satan?). The concept of the pit and judgment is found in the OT (See Isa. 24:21-22) and in other Jewish literature. Locusts as

instruments of judgment are found in Joel 1:4; 2:4-14. The faithful are guarded in this period (7:3).

What is the result of this judgment?

The surprising answer comes in 9:20—the rest of mankind, despite seeing all this, refuses to repent. This again sounds much like Pharaoh in Egypt. There is a sense that despite all God does the impious resist Him. What this shows in the end is that God's judgment is fair and right.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 5

Revelation 10 and 11

Revelation 10—Who is the angel? What is the meaning of the seven thunders?

What does the angel announce?

The angel is not named, but the designation "mighty" might reflect the Hebrew word "gibbur," which in turn reminds one of "Gabriel" (cf. Dan. 8:16). He is a messenger of God. The rainbow reminds one of the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:13), and of Ezekiel 1:28 and the appearance of God's glory. The shining face reminds one of Moses receiving the law on Sinai (Exodus 34:29). The pillars of fire and the cloud suggest the Exodus travels of the people of Israel (Exod. 13:22).

The angel's appearance suggests a connection between this figure and the revelation of God. He carries the scroll of revelation, and comes from the throne of God and therefore he is a glory-bearing heavenly figure. The loud voice, of course, reflects Ezekiel 1:24 (cf. Rev. 1:10). The seven thunders are not explained; indeed, they are "sealed up" and not written down (Rev. 10:4). This has generally been interpreted two ways: (1) that the seven thunders represent a level of judgment that is suppressed (assumedly for the sake of the elect) or (2) that the seven thunders represent mysteries not revealed to John. In the latter sense this part emphasizes that God's revelation is never completely explained, not even in this series of visions. There is knowledge too deep to be revealed, and the possessors of this vision are warned that more exists to God's salvation and God's judgment than they know.

The angel swears an oath "by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, and the earth and what is in it" (vss. 5-6). God swears by his own nature in Deut. 32:39ff, because God is the only source of truth and trust in the universe. This angel swears by God because God is the author and the legitimizer of all that is about to happen.

The message he gives is "that there should be no more delay"—i.e., the seventh trumpet is about to sound and the final judgment will take place. To a certain extent this means the "time" indicated in Daniel 12:9 is about to be fulfilled and explained:

The man clothed in linen . . . raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven; and I heard him swear by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be accomplished. I heard, but I did not understand. Then, I said, 'O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?' He said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. (Daniel 12:7-9)

The mystery of the end times is about to be ended as the judgment of God goes forth. Literally the phrase in Greek reads, "time is no longer" and the KJV translates accordingly ("there should be time no longer.") However, *chronos* in Greek means not "time", but a "period of time," "season," or "delay." In this case, "delay" is clearly the relevant meaning. The delay is over, and the angel is announcing the completion of God's plan.

10:8-11—The call of John. What happens in these verses? What is the meaning of John's eating of the scroll?

The act of eating the scroll recalls the prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel, and to a lesser extent of Jeremiah:

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." So, I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll that I give to you, and fill your stomach with it." Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey. And he said, "Son of man, go, get you to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them." (Ezek. 3:1-4)

Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart . . . I did not sit in the company of merrymakers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because thy hand was upon me, for thou hadst filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? (Jeremiah 15:16-18).

The eating of the scroll symbolizes the commission given in Rev. 10:11. The symbolic act of eating the scroll is very appropriate: the word of God is ingested by the prophet, emphasizing the fact that the Word is not something they have as a normal course of things, but specially provided by God. Taking the word into them enables them to give the word out (in 4 Ezra, the prophet/scribe Ezra drinks a cup and then writes out the prophecy). The idea is that unless the prophets were equipped by God they would have no word.

The bitterness and the sweetness of the word is suggested in Jeremiah 15. On the one hand, the Word points to the salvation of God, which is a joy and sweet in taste. But, the Word is also judgment, and that gives a bitter taste.

Revelation 11:1-3—The Prophecy over Jerusalem and the Temple.

What is the meaning of measuring of the temple? What is the prophecy given John?

The measuring of the temple recalls similar acts in the OT. In Ezekiel 40-48 the angel of the Lord measures out a rebuilt temple and Jerusalem, signifying God's restoration of the nation after exile:

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and brought me in the visions of God into the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city opposite me. When he brought me there, behold there was a man, whose appearance was like bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring reed in his hand . . . And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears and set your mind upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you; declare all that you see to the House of Israel." . . . The he went into the gateway facing east, going up its steps, and measured the threshold of the gate . . . (Ezekiel 40:1c-6)

Not all of the "measuring" metaphors in OT prophecy suggest restoration, however. Some suggest the coming judgment of God:

Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of every one who hears of it will tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I

will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. (II Kings 21:12-13)

He showed me: behold, the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, "Amos what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said, "Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of people Israel; I will never again pass by them; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste." (Amos 7:7-9b)

What is meant by the measuring here in Revelation 11? On the one hand the coming judgment against the city is clearly marked out: The city will be conquered and gentiles will march over it for 42 months. This again is reminiscent of OT prophecy, especially the prophecies of Daniel:

Thus he said, "As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth which shall be different from all the kingdom and it shall devour the whole earth. . . . and another (king) shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, two times and half a time." (Daniel 7: 23-25)

"And after 62 weeks an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war; desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week; and for half of the week he shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator" (Daniel 9:26-27)

The man clothed in linen . . . raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven; and I heard him swear by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be accomplished. I heard, but I did not understand. Then, I said, O my lord, what shall be the issue of these things?' He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.' (Daniel 12:7-9)

What we are seeing here is the final "week" of the 70 weeks of Daniel. In Daniel (9:20-27) the angel Gabriel tells Daniel the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy for the exile of the nation (Dan. 9:2, cf. Jere. 29:10) will in fact be 70 weeks of years. The last week of these years will be a time of special tribulation for Israel, when the temple sacrifice is cut off.

This time, therefore, represents the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy.

Revelation 11:4-14. The two witnesses. What are the symbols of the two "witnesses"? What do these symbols mean? What is their ministry? What happens to them? How are they redeemed by God?

Again we need to look at our Old Testament background. The two figures before the throne of God with lampstands and olive trees undoubtedly are reminiscent of Zechariah 4:

And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me . . . and he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps which are on top of it. And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." . . . Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" . . . and he said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth." (Zech. 4:1-14)

In the Zechariah prophecy the lampstand is a symbol for the temple which Zerubbabel is commanded to rebuild. The two olive trees stand for the "two anointed ones," namely the high priest and the king (in this case Joshua and Zerubbabel, respectively).

In Revelation what is different is that there are two lampstands and two olive trees—essentially one for each witness. There cannot be two temples, so the old symbolism of lampstands=temple is no longer operative. What do the lampstands mean, then?

Some have suggested the two lampstands harken back to the seven churches, specifically the two churches commended by the Lord (namely Smyrna and Philadelphia), but this seems strange. Others have suggested that the two lampstands represent the totality of the church, and are two in number simply to accord with the two witnesses in Zechariah.

Still others have connected the two lampstands with the Jewish-Christian church (the 144,000) and the Gentile Christian church (the multitude). Others have insisted that the lampstands have nothing to do with the church at all, and only reflect the witness-character of the two prophets. However, this is hard to accept given (1) the connection between the symbol of lampstand/church earlier and (2) the background in Zechariah 4.

Obviously the lampstands connect with the two witnesses, but also suggest a connection with the witness of the total church, Jewish and Gentile Christian. Typically, we connect the two witnesses with the OT prophet Elijah (who shut up the sky during his earthly ministry) and the OT leader-figure, Moses (who turned the water into blood). There were OT prophetic expectations that both Moses and Elijah would return in the end-times:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die." And the Lord said to me, "They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." (Deuteronomy 18:15-19)

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse. (Malachi 4: 5-6)

The message is that Moses and Elijah will come back and for a time will lead a ministry of repentance and conversion. During that time no one will be able to resist them. Revelation 11:7 indicates that their ministry will come to an end, and they will be attacked by the beast which comes from the pit. More will be said about this beast in coming chapters, but clearly it is the anti-Christ. The beast symbol we have seen in Daniel.

These prophets will be killed in Jerusalem—now a Sodom~Egypt symbol, since the city of God is now the symbol of rebellion (vs. 8). For a brief period, 3 1/2 days, they will be displayed in an humiliating fashion. The evil of the earth will rejoice over their seeming defeat and the "release" they enjoy from their message (vs. 10). Then God will raise them up and call them to heaven (vs. 12). This will be the sign for the sounding of the last trumpet and the beginning of the last judgments of the bowls.

Some have suggested that what is seen here is the anti-Christ's persecution of the church, symbolized by the two witnesses. There are some serious arguments for this view:

- (1) vs. 12 suggests the rapture of the church as described in 1 Thess. 4:16-18;
- (2) the "witnesses" are martyrs in the sense that witness = martyrs in the letters to the churches earlier (Rev. 2:13). The same type of persecution is also suggested in the letters (Rev. (2:10, 25; 3:3,10,19).

However the action here in Rev. 11 clearly takes place in Jerusalem, not Asia Minor; the specific churches of chapters 2-3 cannot be in mind. If the whole church is meant, does this mean that every Christian is killed? This does not seem likely. Perhaps, the two witnesses experience what all the churches experience to a lesser degree. The two witnesses are, I think, two historical persons and not simply symbols for the church at large.

What happens with the seventh trumpet?

Compare Revelation 11:17ff with some earlier hymns in the book, especially 4:11; 5:9-10; 7:12.

When you compare these songs you see the shift in content:

- Chapter 4—God celebrated as creator
- Chapter 5—The Lamb celebrated as the one who died for us
- Chapter 7—Those who belong to the Lamb are set aside and preserved
- Chapter 11—God's judgement is released

We move from God as a creator of good, to the selection of his special people, to his judgment against those who reject him.

11:17ff also compares the wrath of God with the wrath of the nations, and God's wrath is greater. What is key here is that God, "Who are and who wast" has "taken thy great power and begun to reign." This is the time for judgment, for the "destroying of the destroyers of the earth."

"Wrath" often sounds negative to us. We think of anger as a bad emotion. But John sees it differently. God is angry at those who have been destroying the earth. To stop evil and destruction is not bad, but a good thing, and that is what the Kingdom is about.

Finally, the temple of God in heaven is opened (vs. 19), and this is accompanied with theophanic signs of thunder and lightning. The **open** temple is a sign of the immanence of God. God will be close to his creation and available. But this change has a price: what is evil and in rebellion against God must be cleansed and obliterated until only the good is left.

The seventh trumpet announces, "The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." The kingdom of God does not completely begin at this point, but the road to the Kingdom has begun. In the next few chapters after the coming of the two witnesses (ch. 11), we see the coming of the dragon and the two beasts (chs. 12-13), followed by the bowls of wrath (chs. 15-16). In a sense the seven seals/seven trumpets chapters show God's last attempts to win people to repentance and faith. Then, in the seven bowls, we see the completion of God's wrath.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 6

Revelation 12 and 13

12:1-17—What is the action in this vision? Who do the various figures represent [the woman, the child, the dragon]? What is the meaning of this vision?

This is a difficult vision to interpret. The figure of a pregnant woman in childbirth is found in Isa. 26:17f as a metaphor for Israel in suffering, seeking the Lord. Israel is frequently portrayed as the Lord's bride (Isa. 54:1; Jere. 3:20; Ezek. 16:14-18; Hosea 2:19) and as a mother (Isa. 49:21; Hos. 4:5 and others) and even in birth (Micah 4:9f).

In other religious stories outside the OT, we also see pregnant women being pursued by dragons with the intent of harming the child. In Greek mythology Leto, the mother of Apollo, is pursued by Python the dragon. Similar stories are found in Babylonian and Persian myths. In short, there seems to be a common use of this type of sequence:

Woman = figure representing a nation

Child = savior figure

Dragon = evil powers arrayed against the country

Therefore, why see anything but the woman as a figure of Israel? But some have argued for a different interpretation:

1. As we suggested in the previous lesson, many feel we have a substitution of the church for Israel in these visions. Moreover, the word used here for the ascent of the child (*harpadzo*, vs. 5) is not the normal word used in reference to an ascension (usually either *analambano* or *anaphero*). Instead it is the same verb, *harpadzo*, used in 1 Thess. 4:17—in reference to the rapture, and the word used in reference to ecstatic experiences such as 2 Cor. 12:2 and Acts 8:39. But if the woman represents the church, who is the child?

2. Dr. L. D. Thomas (pastor of this church in the 1970s and 80s) tried to solve this problem by saying that the woman represents the visible church while the child represents the true church, the raptured church. This is somewhat supported by the "rod of iron" given to the child, something also given to the church of Thyatira in Rev 2:27. On this view, the church left behind becomes the tribulational church, to be disciplined by tribulation and carry on a witness to Jesus.

It is hard to get a time frame on this chapter. Assuming the dragon is Satan, we are seeing an event which really started before (or during?) the ministry of Jesus (since he claims in Luke 10:18 to have seen Satan fall from heaven). Given this, we are not simply seeing here a portrait of future events, but rather a drama of the whole struggle between Satan and God's people .

I cannot find much convincing support for a distinction between a "raptured church" and a "tribulational church." Note how John describes the church at this point: "The dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the

commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus." These are the faithful people of God, not a church having to endure discipline because they missed the rapture!

Therefore, the reference to the woman, clothed in the sun (cf. Dan 12:3), with the moon under her feet, and a crown of 12 stars [cf. the 12 tribes] is best seen as Israel. [ACA: Another option is to see the woman as a symbol of both Israel **and** the church, in the sense that the woman represents **"the people of God,"** who at one stage are the nation of Israel and at another the church. That would allow for the statements made in this chapter that the woman gives birth to the Messiah, who is taken up to heaven, but she also gives birth to many other children. Such a fluid use for a symbol is not uncommon in apocalyptic literature. Also, if John thinks of "the people of God" as those who truly and faithfully serve him, in whatever age, we should perhaps not require him to make as hard a distinction between "Israel" and "the church" as modern discussions of eschatology tend to make.]

The child, then, is almost surely Christ. The woman has "many children," which is consistent with the idea that Christ is the firstborn of many brethren. The biggest problem with this idea is that the child is snatched away from the dragon before he can be harmed—how does that fit in with the cross? Is the "snatching" a reference to the ascension? This is a little difficult, but the connection of the child to the throne of God (vs. 5), and to victory over the dragon (vs. 10) seems again to point to Jesus. The "snatching away" may suggest the victory of Jesus over Satan at the cross.

The dragon is clearly Satan (vs. 9). What do the 7 heads and 10 horns mean? The horns connect him with the beast of Daniel 7, suggesting that we are seeing that drama replayed. This is all about the establishment of God's kingdom. The 7 heads connect with the Leviathan, an evil beast appearing in Psa. 74:13-14 and elsewhere. The number seven may suggest Satan's perfect evil nature, or may serve to connect Satan and the whore of Babylon of later chapters.

The dragon wages war on the woman and the "stars of heaven" (normally a reference to angels) and is finally defeated by Michael and his angels—see again Daniel 12. As we said earlier, Jesus tells us Satan has been kicked out of heaven; earth has become his special place of power for the meantime.

What happens in vss. 13-17? How is the woman saved from the dragon? Who is John really talking about?

The action at the end of the chapter refers to events on earth. The dragon seeks to pursue her and her children on earth. The woman is protected by eagles (see the same motif in Deut. 32:10-12; Exod. 19:4). The reference to "3 and a half" times connects back again to Daniel 7:25; 12:7. What we are seeing here is another version of those visions, the unfolding of the last week of Daniel's 70 weeks. During this time Israel is still protected from Satan.

Verse 17 is significant because the offspring of the woman now come into play. These are specifically Christian believers. Clearly here we find a switch from Israel (the woman) to the church. In our visions the church is being persecuted by Satan, but as Satan has been defeated in heaven, we know he will also be defeated on earth!

13:1-18—Who are these two beasts?

Note a comparison between the beasts and Christ in the rest of the book:

First Beast

crown with blasphemous name, 13:1
10 horns, 7 heads, 13:2
mortal wound 13:3
utters haughty words, 13:5
makes war on saints, 13:7

Christ

crowned with many crowns, secret name, 19:11
7 horns, 7 eyes, 5:6
Lamb slain, 5:6
Is worshipped, 5:8
smites nations, 19:15

Second Beast

like a lamb 13:11
speaks like a dragon
acts as priest 13:12
works great signs
deceives 13:14
causes image of the beast
to speak 13:15
marks/seals the unrighteous, 13:16
number = 666, 13:17

Lamb slain, 5:6
voice like thunder, 1:15
opens God's scroll, chapter 6

How do these figure connect with the anti-Christ?

It might be useful to copy the following passages on a page as a handout:

- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
- Daniel 7:7-8
- 2 Baruch 29:34 (an apocryphal book)

The first beast reminds us of several biblical figures. Daniel 7 features four beasts. In Daniel 7 each beast represents a kingdom, while the horns represent individual kings. Here in Revelation both are combined.

The sea is typically a symbol of evil (note Rev. 21:1). In 2 Baruch the monsters of the sea are symbols of evil. In Revelation this sea monster is a symbol of evil forces in opposition to God.

These beasts are in every way anti-Christ and anti-God. Their miracles are false miracles. They encourage blasphemy, not worship. They take up many of the attributes of God and Christ but always in twisted ways. They have power and authority, but not for good.

The beasts, therefore, make war on the saints, doing the work of the dragon of chapter 12. They seem to be the earthly instruments of Satan for oppression. Clearly, there are Christians around. Note that 2 Thessalonians implies the same thing: that Christians will have to endure persecution from anti-Christ.

Note who is in the greatest danger from these beasts: those who worship the Beast. The Beast is “allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them” (13:7). But the ones in worst danger from the Beast are the people of “every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth” who choose to “worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain” (13:7-8). These verses remind us that none of this is accidental. The fake wound of the beast mocks the real wounds of the Lamb. Jesus dies for the faithful; the beast makes the faithful die. [ACA: This becomes the decisive division in humanity—those who worship the Lamb versus those who worship the Beast.]

What is the meaning of 13:9-10?

These verses underline the final nature of the final judgment. If you are made captive now, you remain a captive. Therefore, people are warned to “take heed,” to be ready and to endure. For the faithful, John is saying, “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.” Christians for a while are going to experience persecution, defeat and even death. There are times when our hope is simply to endure!

Why two beasts?

The first beast, with its diadem and power, seems to represent the kingly aspect of power. The second beast (which seems like a lamb) seems to represent the priestly aspect of power. Priest and King are the main two offices of the Old Testament, and these two beasts corrupt both. Revelation 13:13 says the priestly beast will seemingly work signs and wonders (a point consistent with 2 Thessalonians). The priestly beast will make an image which will seem to talk to the people (vs. 15). What we will have is religion gone mad, a pseudo-religion which feels justified in killing all who do not follow it. The dragon/beast/priestly beast form a sort of unholy trinity to plague the faithful.

13:16-17 mocks the sealing of the 144,000 we saw earlier. Now the unrighteous are sealed for service to evil. What does the number 666 mean?

Many answers have been given from “Nero” to “Hitler” to “Luther” and “the Pope.” It has also been pointed out that “Jesus” in Greek has the numerical value of 888. In that light, 666 stands opposite to 888 on the other side of the triple number for perfection, 777. Although many theories have been put forward to link 666 with a specific historical person, 666 probably represents perfect imperfection. The beasts will have the power to corrupt people and will mark others with this power.

It is the nature of evil that it loves bad company, and it insists on others sharing its bad manners and corrupt desires. God is sometimes content to let evil alone, at least for a time, but rarely is the opposite true. Good is an affront to evil and a condemnation of it. So evil will almost always set about stamping out good. The number 666 represents the tendency in history for this; in the time of the anti-Christ we will see perfect imperfection embodied.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 7

Revelation 15-18

Read chapter 15. What does John see in heaven? How does the song of verses 3-4 interpret what is about to happen? What is the significance of the smoke in the temple?

We are about to see the last of the acts of judgment played out in heaven. The seven bowls of wrath which appear in chapter 16 correspond to the seven seals and the seven trumpets—three heavenly "sevens" of judgment to balance out the mark of the Beast (666).

The action is interpreted through the song of those in heaven who conquered the beast (15:2)—a song of "Moses" and the "Lamb." The reference to Moses reflects connections between this chapter and Deuteronomy 32, especially reference to God's judgment on Israel's enemies.

The song emphasizes the rightness of God's judgment. God's wrath is not capricious or willful, but just. "The nations" will be led to worship God because of his actions—in short, judgment will produce faith, not horror.

The "smoke" in the temple reminds one of Isaiah 6:4 and the consecration of the temple in 2 Chronicles 7:1. The smoke represents God's cleansing fire, the cleansing of repentance.

Note the seven bowls of wrath in Chapter 16.

16:2, #1—sores on those marked by the beast

16:3, #2—sea becomes blood, all living creatures in it die

16:4, #3—rivers and fresh waters become blood

16:8, #4—sun burned up; people fail to repent

16:10, #5—darkness on throne, people fail to repent

16:12, #6—Euphrates dried up, frog-like spirits, Armageddon

16:17, #7—Babylon struck by God's wrath

What is going on with these plagues? On the one hand note the close ties of this material to the Exodus plagues. The bowls of wrath represent the judgment of God against the enemies of his people, like the Exodus plagues. And, like the Exodus plagues, stress is laid on the peoples' refusal to repent. This refusal shows that God's judgment is just and deserved (16:6). The bowls of wrath reveal the justice of God and the stubborn rebellion of those who reject his mercy.

Read 17:1-18—Who is the 'great harlot'?

Few chapters of this book are more difficult to unravel than chapter 17. The following identifications of this figure have been suggested:

1. Babylon is literally the kingdom between the Tigris and the Euphrates. The many waters could refer to these rivers.
2. The historical role of Babylon is meant here as the great oppressor of Israel. Jeremiah 50 predicts the downfall of Babylon and her judgment because of her treatment of Israel. Babylon, especially in Daniel, represents human strength and idolatry in opposition to God. All this will be humbled in the final judgment.
3. Babylon is symbolic for Rome. The phrase "seated on many waters" is interpreted in vs. 15 as "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." That is, this represents the oppression of many nations. The woman is said to be seated on a beast with seven heads; this could refer to the famous "seven hills" of Rome. In John's world, Rome occupies the place and role of ancient Babylon. The connection between Rome and Babylon is made in other apocalyptic material (Sibylline Oracles V 142; 4 Ezra 15:44f; 16:1). Even in non-apocalyptic writings, Christians could use "Babylon" as a code word for Rome. See also 1 Peter 5:13.
4. Babylon represents false Israel. "Harlot" is applied to Israel in numerous places in the Old Testament (Isa. 1:21; Jere. 3; Ezek. 16 and 23). In this view the "false Jerusalem/Babylon" of Revelation 17 contrasts with the "new" Jerusalem of chapter 21.
5. Babylon represents the false church. Frequently, Protestant interpreters have tried to tie this chapter with condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church.

The reference to this Babylon ruling over "kings" of the earth probably excludes #4 and #5, since neither Israel nor the Roman Catholic Church really fits the description.

Probably, it is best to see the harlot as either a symbol for Rome, or as more broadly a symbol for all such kingdoms that gather political power to themselves for greedy gain, and who persecute God's faithful. Babylon represents not only the Rome of John's day, but all politically oppressive kingdoms and states since.

What is the meaning of the fact that the 'woman' sits upon the beast? Who is this beast?

This shows us how slippery apocalyptic imagery can be. In this chapter the woman first sits on "waters," then on the beast. The seven "heads" of the beast are first "seven hills," then in 17:10 seven "kings." Clearly, all the imagery is symbolic, and very flexible and changeable symbolism at that.

The beast reminds us of the beast of chapter 13. It is a mockery of Christ in that it "was and is not and is to come" (cf. earlier words in chapter 1). The portrait of the beast of Daniel 7:7f also connects with this figure. In Daniel 7:23 the beast definitely represents a kingdom, and the 10 horns of the beast represent ten different kings (Daniel 7:24).

Here the beast seems to be anti-Christ of Revelation 13, but at the same time it is a kingdom with seven kings, and an eighth king who seems to be the beast again (17:11). How this can be

is not explained, but it should warn us that apocalyptic visions do not worry much about logic or chronology in making their point.

When it comes to identifying the kings, we again find many different suggestions:

1. The Kings numbered 1-6 represent rulers of Rome beginning with Julius Caesar to Nero. In this view, the anti-Christ is yet to come.
2. The eight Kings represent Augustus Caesar to Nero for numbers 1-5; the three short-reign rulers after Nero are omitted, and the counting resumes with Vespasian, Titus, and then Domitian for numbers 6-8. Domitian, who persecuted the church greatly in the 90s, is portrayed as the especially bad ruler.
3. Counting the Kings 1-7 begins with Nero. The three emperors during 68-69 AD are counted (after Nero). The list ends again with Domitian as number 7. Number 8, the anti-Christ, is yet to come.
4. Kings 1-7 begin with Nero, skips Vitellus (one of the three), and ends with Trajan (another time of persecution in the early second century).
5. The Kings represent seven periods of Roman history.
6. The Kings represent seven periods of world history (Old Babylon; Assyria; Medean-Persian; Hellenistic; Roman; European; but the 7th is yet to come).

All of these suggestions have problems. If we pick any set of actual Roman emperors, the fact is that the end of the world does not follow the seventh. So, we have to hypothesize an interval between number seven and the anti-Christ. There is, however, no evidence for this in the text, no clue or hint that we should leave such a gap.

Neither can we easily divide up world history into seven "Kingdom" periods. Calling everything after Rome the "European" period seems hardly accurate—that period has seen numerous kingdoms with little connection between them; it does not at all look like the homogeneous rule of Rome or Babylon.

Perhaps best is to take the whole chapter as purely symbolic. The number "seven" indicates that the "right" amount of human history will pass, and when God's plan for history is complete judgment will come. The last king/kingdom will be a summation of the evil and oppression that have been in all the kingdoms so far.

Some interpreters have connected the "10 kings" referred to in 17:12 with ten rulers under the power of the anti-Christ. Others suggest they are ten nations, some going so far as to see the European Union as the fulfillment of this prophecy. Note, however, that they are said to rule "one hour" in 17:12. It is unlikely this is meant to be literally true, rather it's symbolic of a very short period of time during which these ten figures (whether individual rulers or nations) are under the control of the beast/anti-Christ and serve as extensions of his evil.

Notice how much of this chapter has to be taken symbolically:

the "one hour" in 17:12
the changes of the places where the harlot sits (17:2, 9)
the meaning of the "seven heads" (7 hills, 7 kings, 17:9)

To me this fluid language argues for taking all of the imagery and numbers in the chapter symbolically. This represents the tendency of human institutions and kingdoms, as well as individuals, to rebel against God, persecute the people of God, and reject the way of God.

Perhaps the most important verse is 17:17:

“For God put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.”

All these kings and kingdoms and beasts and harlots think they are following their own will and plan and rejecting God. But actually the purpose of God is being carried out all along. In the end, their rebellion will only make the difference between those who love God and those who reject him very plain. In the end, the anti-Christ will only serve to prove that God is just.

I doubt you have time to read or study chapter 18 in class. Here we see the heavenly song of triumph and judgment against Babylon. Those who have profited under Babylon's rule will grieve, but the righteous will rejoice that evil is judged and done away with.

The meaning of "Babylon" is ultimately this: God will not allow evil and destruction to continue for a time, but he will inevitably execute judgment and bring all wrongdoing and sin to an end. When that occurs, everyone will acknowledge that it is the justice of God to end evil, and the mercy of God to stop destruction. All will acknowledge and give praise to God (see Phil. 2:9-11).

A Note on Armageddon

In Hebrew the word "Armageddon" could mean either "Har-meggedon" ("hill of Meggedon/Meggido") or "irmeggido" (city of Meggido). The former is more likely as a transliteration of the letters; the problem is that there is no hill at Meggido. Others have suggested the word is a corruption of the Hebrew, "Har-Mo'ed" which would translate as the "Mountain of Assembly." That would be an apt description of the place where all the kings of the world gathered, but how such a corruption of the word took place is speculative.

Many scholars, especially dispensationalists, connect this reference with Ezekiel 38-39. Ezekiel 38:14ff especially talks of a gathering of an army against Israel by "Gog," and God's resulting judgment.

The problems with this suggested connection are as follows:

1. Revelation makes no mention of God or Magog until chapter 20. It is easier to see a fulfillment of Ezekiel 38-39 as coming at the end of the millennium.
2. The final battle in Revelation is not against Israel, but against Christ.
3. Jesus compared his return to the unexpected coming of a “thief” (Matt. 24:43-44). Jesus’ point, and the point of the visions in Revelation, is not to help us pinpoint the timing of the action, but to tell us to be ready at all times. (See also 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; and Rev. 3:3.)

In short, I don't find it helpful to connect Revelation 17 with Ezekiel.

What about post-, pre- and amillennialism?

Pre-millennialism teaches that Christ's return will take place before the millennium (1000 years of an earthly kingdom, followed by the final judgment.

Post-millennialism argues that the millennium precedes Christ's return. This was a very popular theology in the nineteenth century and fueled the evangelism of the day. The exact length of the millennium (in this view) is not important.

Amillennialism see the 1000 year reign of Christ as symbolic and not literal. The millennium is either part of present history (as the reign of Christ in the church spiritually) or the millennium is a symbol of a real kingdom set up by Christ but not a specific length of time.

Of the three, pre-millennialism and amillennialism are better fits for the evidence of the book of Revelation. If Revelation 19 is the book's picture of the return of Christ, then the millennium (chapter 20) obviously comes afterward. The argument for amillennialism is simply that Revelation typically uses numbers symbolically and not literally (e.g., 666; 144,000). The "perfect" nature of 1000 (10 x 10 x 10) and its triple nature (compare the three sets of seven in the book), make it difficult to know whether the number is literal or symbolic of God's perfect plan.

Read 21:35; 22:35. What are the key characteristics of the new heaven/earth?

21:3—God will dwell with people there. The verb used means "to tabernacle," the same verb used in John 1:14 in reference to the incarnation. Now the purpose of the incarnation, the presence of God among His people, will be carried out in a more general sense.

21:4—There will be no sorrow. All the symbols of sin and evil will disappear (the sea, death). The suffering of the present, imperfect world will end.

21:5—All things will become new.

21:22-25—No temple will be needed. Even the sun and the moon will no longer be needed. The distinction between heaven and earth will be dissolved, and there will be perfect unity between God and the righteous. In short, the new heaven and earth will eliminate all the imperfections of the present life, and bring God and people into perfect harmony.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 8

Revelation 19-22

We're covering a good bit of territory in this last lesson on chapters 19-22. You obviously cannot go verse by verse; so you will need to work on the highlights. The key issues here relate to the millennium and the second coming.

Read 19:9-16, 19-21. Who is the "bride" of the lamb? What is the meaning of the "marriage supper of the Lamb"?

The image of the bride is often applied to Israel in the OT (see Isa. 54:5-6; Ezek. 16:8-10) and in later rabbinic literature. In the NT Paul compares the church to the bride of Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:25-32. Jesus uses the image of the wedding feast to describe the Kingdom of God in Matthew 22:1-14 (and parallels).

The marriage of the Lamb and the bride in Revelation 19 reflects the great celebration that comes with the defeat of the "harlot, Babylon" in chapter 18 and the final establishment of God's kingdom. The union of God and his faithful people is begun. It is a time of celebration and the renewal of love and covenant commitment. The "bride" is a symbol of this new love and union.

Who is the white rider? What is the meaning of the description given in 19:11ff?

Here the white rider is Christ. The figure on the horse reminds us deliberately of the first appearance of Christ in chapter 1. That he is called "faithful and true" reminds us of the messianic promise of Isaiah 11:1-5. Note some significant details describing him:

many diadems (vs. 12)—Compare the description of the beast, and of Christ in 1:14 .
This is the true King of Heaven.

name no one knows (vs. 12)—In Jewish tradition the name of "Yahweh" was never pronounced; it was called the "Ineffable Name." See again the reference to the Name in 2:17. The possession of God's name means the White Rider bears the character and authority of God.

robe dipped/sprinkled in blood (vs. 13)—Ancient manuscripts offer two different readings here. Some say "dipped," perhaps stressing the vengeance of God; others say "sprinkled," perhaps reflecting the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices. Whose blood is used here is not clarified.

Word of God (vs. 13)—Heavenly figures often have many names or titles. The "word" and "name" of God are revealed through Christ according to John 1.

sharp sword from his mouth (vs.15)—A sign of Christ 's judgment

robe/thigh inscribed with "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (vs. 16)—Some disagree on how to interpret this. Some suggest we have a misreading of an original Hebrew for banner ("degal") as "thigh/foot" ("regal" in Hebrew). The "r" and "d" in Hebrew could easily be mistaken for one another. But archaeologists have found ancient statues of divine figures with names on their thighs; so the passage makes sense as it stands. In any case, we see another sign that this is the Messiah.

Clearly the work of the White Rider is judgment. Just as clearly, this is Christ returning to carry out the judgment of God.

Read chapter 20

What happens to Satan in Revelation 20? Why are the battles of chapter 19 repeated?

What is the function of the millennium?

Satan is bound for 1000 years (20:1-3); is loosed for a short while (vs. 7); deceives nations for a while (vs. 8); and is thrown into a lake of fire (vs. 10). It is almost as if the whole history recounted in the book of Revelation is repeated again in this chapter. It is as if the book of Revelation does not see chapter as fulfilling the prophecies of Ezekiel 38-39, and these prophecies must be fulfilled now.

Note the progress of these four chapters:

Revelation 19—Christ's victory on earth over anti-Christ

Revelation 20—God's victory over Satan on earth

Revelation 21-22—Christ's Kingdom on earth (new Jerusalem descends); new heaven and new earth

This suggests that these chapters represent a two-step completion of the "Kingdom":

1. Christ over anti-Christ, Earthly Kingdom
2. God over Satan, New Earth/Heaven

What is the millennium then?

The 1000 year reign of Christ is understood by pre-millennialists to be God's reign through Christ on this earth with all its imperfections. According to this view, the complete elimination of sin and death, and the complete healing of the breach between earth and heaven, will come in a yet further fulfillment of God's plan (after the millennium).

Right now, the life of a Christian is only a glimmer of the life of the kingdom under Christ (the millennium), which is itself but a glimmer of the final purpose of God (the new heaven and new earth). [ACA: Remember that post-millennialists and amillennialists will have a different understanding of the 1000 years. See the previous lesson. Over the centuries many faithful Christians have subscribed to different views of the millennium. Only the future will decide this issue.]

What is involved in the millennial kingdom?

This is described in 20:4-6. Clearly the martyrs of the faith are included in this "first resurrection." Is the whole church included? This depends on whether the first part of vs. 4 is intended to designate a different group from the rest of the verses. The verse could be read as in the RSV: "even the souls of those who have been beheaded," that is, **only the martyrs** are meant. In this sense the millennial kingdom restores to the martyrs what they have lost.

Alternatively, we should note that the churches mentioned in chapters 2-3 are promised that they will sit on Christ's throne of judgment (3:21) and be given power to rule the nations (2:26f). It is hard to think in these prophecies that only the martyrs of the tribulation period are

going to be part of the millennial kingdom. Apocalyptic literature tends to emphasize God's provision for the persecuted, and this may be the main thought in the millennial kingdom.

At this point it might be well to pass out a sheet containing the following passages:

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
- 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
- 1 John 3:2-3
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-26
- Mark 13:2, 8-9, 14-23, 24-32

These are the critical passages dealing with the resurrection of the righteous and the second coming in the New Testament.

What do these passages say about the second coming? The millennium? The resurrection?

1 Thessalonians connects the coming of Jesus and the resurrection. Paul is addressing a very specific question here: what will happen to believers who die before Christ returns? Paul gives an answer: the dead in Christ will be resurrected first. This passage gives the best reference to the "rapture" with its insistence that those who are alive at the second coming will meet Jesus "in the air."

2 Thessalonians handles a different problem: has the resurrection already happened? Paul says "No!" because we have not yet seen the anti-Christ. Here Paul says that Christ will not appear (and we will not "assemble to meet him") until the time of rebellion occurs and the "man of lawlessness" appears. His description here sounds much like Revelation 12-19: the coming of Christ comes after the anti-Christ in connection with the final judgment.

1 Corinthians 15 also connects the coming of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead. Paul's description is much like Revelation 20-22, except that Paul has no millennium separating two resurrections. What Revelation has playing out over a long period of time, Paul sees as one basic event.

Mark 13 contains Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple and the final days. Jesus predicts a time of persecution for Christians. The eschatological signs (darkened sun and moon, heavens shaking, etc.) are also found in Revelation 8:12-13; 16:8ff. But again there is no reference to any millennium.

[ACA: Indeed the millennium is explicitly mentioned only in Rev. 20. Since this book is full of metaphorical language and symbols, some question how persuasive it can be to take a number like 1000 literally. On the other hand, a straight, chronological reading of Rev. 19-20 has led many to conclude that there will be a millennial kingdom after Jesus' return, to be followed eventually by a new heaven and a new earth. Either way, things turn out the way God wants them!]