

Study On Revelation

Reflections on This & That

By Jim McGuiggan

Contents

Augustine on the 1st Resurrection	1
Book of Revelation (1 of 9)	2
Book of Revelation (2).....	5
Book of Revelation (3).....	8
Book of Revelation (4).....	10
Book of Revelation (5).....	12
Book of Revelation (6).....	15
Book of Revelation (7).....	17
Book of Revelation (8).....	20
Book of Revelation (9 of 9)	23
Further Remarks on the Revelation.....	26
God's kingdom and Revelation 11.15-17	28
Pathetic little churches--Mighty empires	30
Revelation 20.5, First resurrection	31
Revelation and its way of speaking.....	32
Revelation: The storyline	34
Triumph and Loss in Revelation.....	37

Augustine on the 1st Resurrection

Augustine (of Hippo) thought that the "first resurrection" in Revelation 20:4-5 was the resurrection of sinners to life in Jesus Christ. It would be in line with Ephesians 2:1-6, Colossians 2:12-13, John 5:25, Romans 6:3-7 and other such texts.

Augustine thought of two resurrections. One that began the Christian experience of life in Jesus and the final bodily resurrection which completed the Christian experience. Both resurrections would be the experience of Christians but only the first one, he thought, was in Revelation 20:4-5.

Because Augustine was so influential that view became popular and remains popular today. But the truth of those texts like Romans 6:3-7 is not the truth Revelation 20:4-5 is telling.

In those texts we have people who are outside of Christ entering into a saving union with Christ. Prior to their believer's baptism they are not united with Christ and then by faith they are baptized into Christ and are identified with and enter into union with his death and resurrection.

That is not the setting of Revelation 20. The people who "come to life" in a resurrection in Revelation 20 are already in Jesus Christ. They had earlier experienced the "resurrection" into Jesus. In this setting they had laid down their lives for Jesus Christ in the battle against the Beast and his armies. These are not passing from death outside of Christ into life in Jesus Christ—this had already been accomplished before they were martyred for Christ.

No, let me say it again. Whatever the image in Revelation 20:4-5 is saying (and it is an image) it is saying it about those who already belonged to Jesus Christ and who had therefore experienced a "resurrection" such as is spoken of on Ephesians 2:1-6. The "first" resurrection in Revelation is not dealing with a spiritual resurrection when one becomes a Christian in contrast to the final glorious bodily resurrection.

In Revelation 20 imagery there are "two" resurrections. One, the resurrection of those martyred for Jesus and the resurrection of those killed in the service of the Dragon and the beasts.

In a lengthy and broader-ranging article [Garlington](#) takes the view that the "first resurrection" is written to tell us something about the after-life situation of those that have died in Jesus Christ. He suggests that it speaks of a new intimacy, the martyred believers, as it were, enter the very throne-room of God. He goes with Augustine in saying it is a spiritual resurrection but makes it an extension of Augustine's view. But since he thinks it speaks of an after-life experience prior to the final coming of our Lord and the bodily resurrection, he feels compelled to see a resurrection of "souls".

In his presentation he stresses that it is souls that John sees resurrected and not bodies. This he feels will make the point that the resurrection imaged is not a bodily resurrection. (It would also weaken a premillennial view, you see, which requires a literal resurrection that would then, of course, involve bodies.)

This unduly complicates matters and over-interprets the words (so I judge). John isn't saying he saw the "souls" come to life. If he had said that we would have to conclude that the "souls" (that is, "the spiritual side" of humans, in this case, the Christians) had been killed. This would require "dead souls". A strange idea indeed.

John said he saw "the souls of those that were beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus." He goes on to say that "they" came to life. He isn't isolating the souls from the persons of the martyrs. He's talking about "those" whose souls he saw. "They" came to life and not just their "souls".

A resurrection in scripture, whether figuratively of a nation (as in Ezekiel 37) or an individual in a "spiritual" resurrection (as in Ephesians 2) involves the entire person or persons. The idea of the abstracted "spirit" (or soul) of an individual being resurrected is a concept altogether foreign to the biblical witness.

No, John sees martyrs for Jesus coming to life! The picture he's looking at is a bodily resurrection. But it's an image. A picture that rehearses a truth. As surely as the chaining and imprisonment of Satan was an image and not a literal truth just that surely the resurrection of the martyrs was an image and not a literal truth.

The coming bodily resurrection in passages like 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 remain as true as true and as expected as it ever been, but that's not the truth John is conveying in Revelation 20.

It remains true, however, that the image John sees is a bodily resurrection rather than a resurrection of "dead souls".

Still, in the book of Revelation with its welter of images we're to see what he saw and then work at its meaning. When the seven-headed beast rises from the sea we're supposed to say, "That's what he sees, now what does it mean?" We're supposed to look at Satan being chained and imprisoned for a thousand years and say, "That's what he sees, now what does it mean?" When he sees a bodily resurrection and a thousand year reign with Christ we are supposed to say, "That's what he sees, now what does it mean?"

Book of Revelation (1 of 9)

It seems that many who are interested in the Bible would like to know what the book of Revelation is about but very few want to take the time to get into it. I'm sure there are numerous reasons for that. To begin with, the book isn't written in plain speech like, say, the book of Acts or Genesis or the Gospels and that means more work for an already busy student. Secondly, there's so much disagreement about what the book means that many people feel, "If

all the experts differ how can we, the less experienced, hope to understand it?" So they leave it alone and concentrate on the books they can "draw lessons from." Take my word for it that the book isn't as difficult as the "experts" have made it. It's richer and deeper than all of their insights combined and they concede that, but it's not as obscure as they often give the impression it is. But if you insist on thinking you can't understand it this will undermine your ability to understand it. With God's gracious help, if you want a good working knowledge of its general thrust and a sense of its riches and you're prepared to spend a little time in getting it, you can do it.

Some helpful suggestions

Read a lot in the Old Testament because so much of Revelation's speech and thought is rooted there.

Tell yourself again and again that Revelation is written mainly in images and pictures that aren't supposed to be taken literally. Remind yourself, "That's what he sees, now what does it mean?"

Be content to get a grasp of the main drift and larger issues first before spending too long wrestling with the details. It doesn't matter that you don't know all the answers right now. When you're done you'll admit there's a vast amount that you've missed but you'll feel helped by how much you've learned.

Believe that God wouldn't have written it if it couldn't be understood and then prayerfully work away at the contents.

Credit yourself with as much common sense as the people who paint these wild pictures of what they say is going to happen in the very near future. (What they have been saying for many years is going to happen in the very near future.) We've heard from the "experts" that very soon hailstones will fall, each one weighing about 100 pounds. We hear that all the water on the earth—oceans included—will turn into blood and yet two hundred million warriors from the East will ride on horses into Palestine. All that, they warned us, was going to happen and the Coca-Cola will run out. Yes! You can't butcher Revelation worse than that so get on into it and see what you can do.

Has the book of Revelation been fulfilled?

This is a legitimate question but it leaves a false impression. It makes it appear as though the book of Revelation is more than less a series of predictions. It gives the impression that it is essentially a book that foretells startling events that will unfold in the near future. It would be a mistake to deny that there are events predicted in the book (there are!) but that's true of the Gospels, Acts and the epistles. The book of Revelation is a prophetic call to loyalty to God who alone is worthy of service and praise. And it's an assurance that victory belongs to the people of God no matter who the enemy is. But there are predictive elements in the book that are wrapped up in the truths just mentioned. Yes, but have the predictive elements been fulfilled? I'm certain the answer's yes!

Bear in mind that John wrote the book almost two thousand years ago. When he wrote it he said it was "the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place." (1:1) What must soon take place. Then in 1:3 he urged his readers to take to heart what is written, "because the time is near." Because the time is near. What do you think those two phrases mean? He said that two thousand years ago at the opening of the book. My suspicion is that if we had no special interests that we'd take the words at face value.

And he didn't change his mind as the book closes. In 22:6 the angel says, "The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." Things that must soon take place and just to be sure that we get the message he says this in 22:10. "Don't seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near." Because the time is near.

It looks like everyone knows what these words mean until they come to the book of Revelation. Certain teachers keep telling us that the end of the world is near or that Armageddon is to take place soon. They know what it means in their best-selling books and in their tapes, they know what it means everywhere else in the Bible but when it comes to Revelation the phrases becomes all mystery.

If John walked into your presence today, showed you a scroll and said to you, "This is about what must soon take place!" what would you think? If he repeated, "Take this to heart, because the time is near!" what would you think? If he read the whole thing and then said, "These things are true and must soon take place!" would you think they might be hundreds or thousands of years away? And then he hands you the scroll and as he turned to leave you he says, "Don't seal that revelation up because the time is near!" would you even imagine that it related to centuries from now?

The truth is, the book of Revelation deals with things that related to the Roman Empire, the fourth beast of Daniel 7, when it came into conflict with the New Testament church back in the first centuries. Revelation presents Rome as the tool and instrument of Satan in conflict with Christians who are the body of Christ, the army of the white-horsed rider whose name is: The Word of God (Revelation 19:11-16). It comes to focus in a particular emperor (Domitian) who stands for all that the Roman Empire stood for.

If we can't understand plain phrases that are like an envelope that encloses the whole of the book (scholars call phrases that function in that way an *inclusio*) how do we imagine we'll understand symbols and images that are left without explicit explanation? Whatever the signs and images mean we are to understand this: Two thousand years ago John said the coming events were to happen soon. So when you hear popular writers assure you that they haven't even begun yet you've just been warned.

I've had people tell me that with God time didn't matter and that with him one day is like a thousand years so "at hand" or "soon to happen" may mean anything. It's true, of course, that God isn't bothered by time but his creatures are. If God had been talking to himself this man's remark would have been relevant. But God was talking to puny little people. He takes our humanity into account as Ezekiel 12:21-28 and Daniel 8:26 shows us.

In Daniel 8:26 God says the vision there "concerns the distant future." There is no distant future for God but he wasn't talking to himself. When he spoke to limited humans he spoke of "the distant future" so he knows what words like that mean. The ungodly mocked God's message in Ezekiel chapter 12. At first they said, "These threats are empty. They won't fulfilled." Then they said, "Well, maybe they'll be fulfilled but the vision he sees is for many years from now, and he prophesies about the distant future." And how did God answer them? He answered them in the words we find in Revelation. "Say to them the days are near...it shall be fulfilled without delay..." They said, "Don't worry it's a long way off" and God said, "Worry, the time is near."

Finally on this point. Compare Daniel 8:26 with Revelation 22:10 and let common sense rule. Here's what the two texts say.

Seal up the vision for, it concerns the distant future.

Don't seal up the prophecy, because the time is near.

You can see they're told to do opposite things. But notice why they were told to do opposite things. Daniel is told to seal up the vision because it deals with the distant future. John is told to leave it open because the time is near. God knows what a short time is. Why do people argue against this? Well, for one reason or another they've drawn conclusions about what the images in Revelation mean and they settle for that. When you remind them of truths like the above don't want to receive them because it makes a mess of their whole futuristic scheme. And when you go public, write a lot of books, construct a whole eschatological system

based on your interpretation of these images it's hard to back away. It isn't easy to admit we've been wrong especially if a lot is riding on it. That isn't a good thing but I suppose we've all had the experience and may yet have to face it.

The safest approach to Revelation is to let John tell us what its time frame is rather than us telling John.

The central message of the book of Revelation

The central message is that God alone is to be worshiped and served and that that truth is to be maintained when the Roman beast rises against the people of God. The central message of the book is that the Roman Empire is the expression of the world spirit (the Dragon, Satan) that opposes God's kingdom purpose as it shows itself in Jesus Christ and his followers and they aren't to make peace with the Beast. The central message is that when the smoke clear it's the followers of the Lord Christ that are triumphant and that his Lordship is made concrete and local here on the earth. The Roman Empire claims dominion but it's a satanic claim. They "prove" it by brutality and cruelty. The church insists that Jesus has dominion and they prove it (as followers of Christ) by outliving, out-suffering and out-lasting Rome.

Two major elements in the book

There are some predictive elements and these have been fulfilled. They are summarized and focused in the emperor Domitian who stands for all that is the brutal and bestial Empire. On his tomb, so to speak, Jesus stands and proclaims the kingdom of God. And so aspects of Daniel 2 and 7 are demonstrated as "done!"

There are timeless truths. For example, God alone is Lord and worthy of praise and service. Note how large sections of praise for God occur in chapters 4-12 and 14-19. Sandwiched in between is chapter 13 and the worship of the Beast. Twice John is told to worship no one but God himself. Other major timeless truth are developed in the book.

But if the predictions of Revelation have been fulfilled would that mean Revelation is of no real interest or relevance to us today? Indeed not. Nahum prophesied the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC but to call it useless or irrelevant would be silly. Old Testament prophecies of the birth and suffering of Christ of Christ in his earthly ministry have been fulfilled but we know they aren't useless. There's profoundly more about life with God than having a calendar of future events in our pocket.

This little survey of Revelation will probably be helpful to some but if you want something more in detail maybe—if you can stomach any more of my stuff—you'd be interested in purchasing a book I did on Revelation.

Book of Revelation (2)

The central message of the book of Revelation

The central message is that God alone is to be worshiped and served and that that truth is to be maintained when the Roman beast rises against the people of God. The central message of the book is that the Roman Empire is the expression of the world spirit (the Dragon, Satan) that opposes God's kingdom purpose as it shows itself in Jesus Christ and his followers. The central message is that when the smoke clear it's the followers of the Lord Christ that are triumphant and that his Lordship is made concrete and local here on the earth. The Roman Empire claims dominion but it's a satanic claim. They "prove" it by brutality and cruelty. The church insists that Jesus has dominion and they prove it (as followers of Christ) by outliving, out-suffering and out-lasting Rome. Let's meet some of the leading characters in the book of Revelation.

The central character

The central character is every Bible book (even Esther) is God himself. He's the central character in the book of Revelation. This is what we would expect. We read of him functioning as the Creator and Sustainer of that creation, the Eternal One, the Sovereign, the Judge, the Defender and Vindicator of his people. He's portrayed as the only one deserving of praise and devotion.

The Roman Empire (under three images)

The sea beast (13:1-10).

This image presents Rome as a savage military and civil power. This is one of the beasts in Daniel 7 that comes out of the sea. Waters are used in apocalyptic and prophetic writings as a symbol for the restless nations that clash against each other. Be sure to see Revelation 17:1,15 and Isaiah 17:12-13.

As a military power Rome is unbeatable (Revelation 13:4). She is described as part bear, part leopard and part lion (13:2). The three world powers before her (Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece) were likened to these animals in Daniel 7:2-6. They had passed away but Rome, like them was an anti-God power and as long as Rome lived their spirit lived on (see Daniel 7:12). That's why Rome is described as being made up of these three beasts—as long as Rome lives they live.

The sea beast has seven heads (13:1) which represent seven emperors (17:9) but they also represent the seven hills on which Rome was built (17:9). In 17:11 we will hear of an eighth emperor and we'll say something about the identity of these kings later. Look for a brief comment on the number "eight".

The beast also has ten horns (13:1) that represent Rome's allies who will later turn against her and destroy her (17:12,13,16). You'll notice in these verses that the horns are kings that give their authority to the sea-beast.

The power behind Rome is satanic (13:2,4) so we aren't surprised when we read that the beast persecuted the people of God (13:7).

Remember: The Sea-Beast is Rome presented under the image as a destroying civil and military power.

The Earth-Beast (13:11-18)

The earth-beast is also the Roman Empire—looked at from a religious angle. It looks like a lamb but it has the voice of a dragon (13:11). He looks innocent but he is profoundly dangerous. The work of Richard Horsley and his colleagues really brings this home. (See, for example, Paul and Empire.)

The earth-beast's job is to make all the nations worship Rome (13:4,12-14). He is called "the false prophet" in 16:13 and 19:20. He does signs that lead people to see Rome as the divine kingdom (see 13:13-14 and 19:20). The Roman Empire had its own priesthood, temples, sacrificial system of course and the "concilium" (the priestly fraternity) went around the heads of states and urged the worship of Rome as the goddess Roma and the Roman ambassadors and emperors as her visible representatives. The emperor was the high priest.

Remember: The earth-beast and sea-beast are both Rome. They portray Rome from two different angles. They present her as a false religious system and a ruthless military power whose kingdom was of this world. (Be sure to see Daniel 7 and note that the beasts arise from the sea and are yet called kingdoms of the "earth" (as distinct from the kingdom of heaven).

The Prostitute & the City (17:1,18)

The prostitute who is also a great city is also Rome—looked at as a vast commercial power. Every nation wants to make alliances with her (go to bed with her, so to speak—see 17:2 and 18:3). She is the city built on seven hills and rules the world while John writes his book

(17:18). She is the great city with whom all the merchants of the earth trade in both buying and selling. Read the whole of chapter 18 and see how this is spelled out in great detail.

And what makes her so seductive and appealing? Why is she (as chapter 18 shows) the leading market place of the world? Why does every nation want to trade with her? Because she is supported by the most powerful military engine on earth. The Prostitute rides on (is supported by) the sea-beast (17:3). The most powerful nation was also the greatest buyer of goods and if you wanted to do business you "got in bed" with her. It's important that you take time to read chapter 18 because it makes it crystal clear that the great Whore is a vast commercial center, supported by unstoppable military power.

Late in chapter 17 the sea-beast along with the allies turn against the Whore and tear her to shreds. Some think that that means they both can't be Rome but this is shortsighted indeed. Not only do the historians tell us that Rome destroyed itself (see any good history of the Roman Empire and whatever its limitations *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbons) and we can see it all around us. Nations ceaselessly destroy themselves. Do I need to mention Ireland, Russia, China, America and the rest, nations that have torn themselves apart down the years? Rome was no exception.

Remember: The Prostitute is Rome presented as the world's leading commercial power and to "fornicate with her made the nations rich" (18:3,9,11,15).

Summary: Rome is presented in the book of Revelation from three distinct perspectives. She was a powerful military power (sea-beast), a false religious system that wooed the nations from worship to the true God (earth-beast) and the marketplace for the world (a Prostitute/City)! As with all the major characters in the book we get more than one picture of her and each angle tells its own story.

The People of God (under four images)

The 144,00 that are sealed (7:3-17)

Be sure to see the brief comments later on the significance of numbers in prophetic and apocalyptic literature. See particularly the numbers twelve and one thousand. The 144,000 are said to be God's servants (7:3). They have the name of Jesus and his Father written on their foreheads (14:1 and see 3:12). They follow the Lamb, keep themselves pure and speak the truth (14:4). They are those that are redeemed from the earth and purchased from among men (14:3-4).

The 144,000 represent the followers of God in Jesus Christ in their totality. They make up the whole people of God (the full twelve tribes).

They aren't literal Jews nor are they literal virgins (which is what they're called in 14:4). They are called Jews in this book of symbols and images because "Jew" was the name for the elect of God down the centuries and in the biblical record. An Old Testament name is applied to New Covenant people. This might also be the case with "circumcision" in Philippians 3:3. But in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 John makes it clear there are Jews who don't have the heart that the name Jew speaks of. (Jew, from Judah, which speaks of giving praise to Yahweh.) Notice that in 3:12 non-Jewish believers are said to have Christ's name written on them.

These 144,000 are said to be sealed. It is protection in the face of the judgment of the Lamb mentioned in 6:12-17. The judgment is not to fall until the servants of God are sealed (7:3). Will the awful judgment of 6:12-17 sweep everyone away? No! The judgment there is against the ungodly and so the faithful followers of God are not subjected to it.

This image of marking out the faithful is borrowed from Ezekiel 9:4-6. You need to read that whole section in Ezekiel for yourself. This is all visionary. Nobody here or in Ezekiel literally puts a mark on anybody. It was a vision Ezekiel saw (8:3) and when the judgment took place in actual fact there wasn't a mark on anybody. John is seeing the same thing happening in

Revelation 7. It's the visionary way of saying that the followers of God are under his protection during the judgment. Under his protection because they are his.

But—and this is an important but—while the wrath of God is not directed at his people this does not mean they don't suffer. But does this assurance mean anything since the saints are going to suffer? Yes, because there's a profound difference between punishment and suffering. When God poured out his 586 BC judgment on wicked Israel many of the righteous suffered along with the guilty but no matter what appearances said the prophet's vision told the truth. So it is in Revelation. The assurance that the people of God have nothing to fear from God's judgment is spelled out in 7:9-17.

See in your mind's eye angels putting a mark on the 144,000. Is it worth it to be sealed or marked? Now read 7:14 where we're told that the great multitude are those who have successfully come out of the great tribulation against which the 144,000 are sealed. It's the 144,000 that are sealed against the judgment (7:2-3) but it's the great multitude that comes out of the tribulation. What does that tell you? It tells you that the two groups are the same and that the sealing works!

Remember: The 144,000 are God's people under the Old Testament name of Israel.

Book of Revelation (3)

The central message of the book of Revelation is that God alone is to be worshiped and served and that that truth is to be maintained when the Roman beast rises against the people of God. The central message of the book is that the Roman Empire is the expression of the world spirit (the Dragon, Satan) that opposes God's kingdom purpose as it shows itself in Jesus Christ and his followers. The central message is that when the smoke clears it's the followers of the Lord Christ that are triumphant and that his Lordship is made concrete and local here on the earth. The Roman Empire claims dominion but it's a satanic claim. They "prove" it by brutality and cruelty. The church insists that Jesus has dominion and they prove it (as followers of Christ) by outliving, out-suffering and out-lasting Rome

The Glorious Woman (12:1-17)

We've glanced at the people of God under the image of 144,000 Israelites so here's a brief look at the people of God presented in the image of a glorious woman. The people of God are spoken of as individuals throughout scripture, of course, but very often they are spoken of as a corporate whole. The image of a woman is then used. See Lamentations 1:1, Ezekiel 16:2,32, Isaiah 47:1,5,7,8 and Micah 4:10 as a few examples out of a host. The woman is seen as the corporate whole and the individuals are spoken of as "her children" (see Revelation 12:7 as an example).

This glorious woman wears a crown of twelve stars (12:1) which identifies her as the representative of the whole people of God. The high priest in the Old Testament wore a breastplate on which twelve precious stones were placed. He carried them on his heart into the Holy of Holies and made atonement for the whole house of Israel. The splendor of this glorious woman is that in her crown she has the inner nature of the twelve tribes of Israel (see again the comments on the 144,000 and see Revelation 7:4-8). The number twelve (see later) is the number of God's people.

She wears the sun and has the moon under her feet (12:1). These are the appointed sources that bring light to the world. The Woman is that light-bearer. See Philippians 2:15 and Matthew 5:14-16 and elsewhere.

This picture borrows heavily from the Old Testament. Here you have a woman and her seed opposed by the Serpent (12:9) and that's what we find in Genesis 3:1-5, 14-15. We find the Woman pregnant, about to give birth and the Dragon waiting to destroy the newly born.

This is what we find in Exodus 1:15-16 when the Egyptian king sought the death of the newly born. Here we have the Dragon trying to destroy the Woman by using a river at flood (12:15) and that's what we find in Exodus 1:22. (Isaiah 51:9-10 speaks of Egypt as a dragon. In that day she was how satanic forces expressed themselves.)

The Woman is to be persecuted by the dragon. She suffers a wilderness experience (12:6,14) but even in the wilderness God takes care of her. This echoes the case of Elijah being cared for during the famine that lasted three and a half years (more later) and it reminds us of Israel in the wilderness sustained by God. The Dragon cannot destroy the Child or the Woman (see Matthew 16:18) so he turns on the "rest of her seed". When the Woman's children are seen as contained in her—they are a single whole. They are seen as her "children" when they're looked at as individuals (see 12:11,17).

Remember: The Woman is the People of God viewed as a corporate whole, a single unit. The People of God viewed individually are called "her children".

The Glorious City (21:2—22:5)

The glorious city is the people of God. We saw that the Roman Empire was seen under the images of a wicked Woman and a famed City. The people of God are seen as a glorious Woman and a glorious City.

The Holy City is described as a bride adorned for her husband (21:2). Pay special attention to the fact that when the angel shows John the "bride of the Lamb" (21:9) it is a holy City he shows him (21:10). Now the wife of the Lamb (21:9) is the People of God, the church of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:25-32).

Much of the language and imagery of the People of God as a City is taken from Old Testament texts. Note that the City is a square with walls 1,500 miles high, wide and long. They are 200 feet thick (see 21:15-17). Security is being stressed here for no ancient army could storm such a city. Can you imagine walls 1,500 miles high? Mount Everest is what? Nearly 30,000 feet tall. That's something like 6 miles high, isn't it? These walls are pictured as 230 times the height of Everest.

The City is square, stressing stability, and it's modeled on the Holy of Holies, which was a square. And Israel encamped in a square with the Tabernacle where God dwelled at the center of that square. The Tabernacle was structured as a series of squares.

But it isn't just stable and secure it is glorious, with golden streets, walls of precious gems and twelve gates that are a single pearl each. There are twelve gates with twelve angels on guard, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are on the gates and there are twelve foundations on which are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:12-14 and compare Ephesians 2:20). God and the Christ dwell within (21:22) and the Tree of Life is there and gives twelve kinds of fruit twelve times a year (22:2). The City gives light to the nations of the world (21:24) and the leaves from its Tree of Life give healing to the nations. The Tree of Life makes us think of the Garden of Eden and the river flowing out of the City (22:1) that benefits the earth reminds us of the river that flowed out of the Garden to water the earth (see Genesis 2:8-14 and Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Everything about this City is in contrast to the evil City of chapter 18. Everything about this City and Woman is in contrast to the Woman and City of chapter 17-18. This City is good for the nations and the other is bad for them. This City has God dwelling in it and the other has all kinds of abominations dwelling in it. This City is eternal and glorious and the other is destroyed by burning and is brought to the ground.

Chapter 18 gives a picture of the evil City when the whole story is told. Chapters 21 and 22 give a picture of the glorious City when the whole story is told. The evil City had its day of glory and power but God finally judges it—it is destroyed and humiliated. The glorious City has been trampled on (see 11:2) but it is finally vindicated and made to triumph.

The description of the glorious City in chapters 21-22 is a description of the triumphant People of God—after they have come through their sore years under the Roman oppressor.

The Two Witnesses (11:3-12)

The two Witnesses are the People of God! (Later, see the brief remarks on the number "two".) The description of the two Witnesses is taken mainly from the Old Testament. The couples on which they are modeled include Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha and Zerrubabel and Joshua son of Jozadek (see this in 11:4-6). Just a quick glance at the careers of these men shows that they're God's representatives in an ungodly world and in troublous times. Moses and Aaron smote the earth with plagues, Elijah and Elisha called fire down out of heaven, Elijah is taken up into heaven and Zerrubabel and Joshua were the two light-bearers that stood before the Lord in Zechariah 4:11-14.

The two Witnesses successfully proclaim the word of God while dressed in sackcloth (11:3). In this vision they have the credentials (miraculous signs) that prove they are indeed God's representatives and they have the sackcloth that says they are God's witnesses during times of trouble. Though clothed in sackcloth they can't be stopped. That's in the first scene.

In the second scene describing their work they are attacked and killed (11:7). Their enemies rejoice in what seems like a clear victory over their tormentors (11:7-10). After all, their bodies lie dead for three and a half days (they must surely be dead). But the two Witnesses are raised (like their Master) and are taken up into heaven (11:11-12).

Again the experience of the Church is being imaged. The Witnesses wear sackcloth so they're in trouble but they still carry out their mission and can't be stopped. They are killed but they can't be made to stay dead. (Compare Paul's description of the church under hardship in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 and 6:4-10, especially 6:9.)

Summary: In this section the People of God are pictured for us in three images. A glorious Woman, a glorious City and two Witnesses. The Woman is persecuted but protected, enemy soldiers march in the glorious City but the citadel (11:2) is never taken. The Witnesses wear sackcloth and are slain but no one can keep them from completing their mission and death can't hold them. You will remember that the 144,000 go through the great tribulation but come out dressed for a Jewish Tabernacle feast—all glory and rejoicing. Note that in all this there is pain but protection and trouble but triumph. This trouble and triumph theme runs throughout the book.

Book of Revelation (4)

The central message of the book of Revelation is that God alone is to be worshiped and served and that that truth is to be maintained when the Roman beast rises against the people of God. The central message of the book is that the Roman Empire is the expression of the world spirit (the Dragon, Satan) that opposes God's kingdom purpose as it shows itself in Jesus Christ and his followers. The central message is that when the smoke clears it's the followers of the Lord Christ that are triumphant and that his Lordship is made concrete and local here on the earth. The Roman Empire claims dominion but it's a satanic claim. They "prove" it by brutality and cruelty. The church insists that Jesus has dominion and they prove it (as followers of Christ) by outliving, out-suffering and out-lasting Rome

We've glanced at two leading characters in the book of Revelation. We've looked at Rome, under the images of a sea-beast, an earth-beast and a prostitute/city. We've looked at the People of God imaged as the 144,000 Israelites, A Glorious Woman, a Glorious City and as two Witnesses. We'll take a quick look at Satan and the Christ.

The Devil as a Seven-Headed Beast (12:3-4)

Satan is described as a beast with seven heads and ten horns. That's how Rome the sea-beast is described. Satan is described in the same way because it is Rome through which he expresses himself in the book of Revelation. Had the enemy of Christ and his church been described at having thirty-two heads and seven arms that's how Satan would have been described because he is the power that inspires the enemy.

In Revelation Satan attacks the People of God through emperors and Roman allies in various ways and by various means. In even more ancient times he attacked God's people through Pharaohs and Assyrian kings. The names and the dates and cultures all differed but they were all the same old adversary. When you see Rome at work you see the Dragon at work because Rome exercises his authority (Revelation 13:2,4). The sea-beast and the Dragon are described alike because they both have the same purpose—destroy the People of God and establish their own claim to dominion. You'll remember that the earth-beast looks like a lamb but speaks with the voice of a dragon (12:11).

When God buried the Roman Empire the Dragon's purpose exercised in and through Rome was permanently defeated. But as sure as the world spirit operated in Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome it operates in and through any power that sets itself up against God to hinder his purposes and destroy his People. Suppose some modern state openly undertook to bring Jesus down and destroy his people and suppose John wrote a letter about it. He would describe it in some form or other and he would describe the Devil in the same way he describes the modern state. Revelation 20:7-10 makes the point that Satan though defeated in Rome will show himself in some other form. The book of Revelation assures us that whatever form he takes God defeats him, the People of God triumph and the world benefits. It's important to keep in mind that all these powers have one character and purpose—they're anti-God and anti-life. When God's People oppose these kingdoms and states they are opposing not only flesh and blood but the world spirit that thrives in them (compare Ephesians 6:12 and 2 Corinthians 4:4).

The Devil as a fallen star (9:1-2,11)

The use of "a star" to represent people is common in scripture. Daniel 12:3 speaks of the righteous as stars and in Revelation 22:16 Jesus calls himself the Bright and Morning Star. Though this is common enough we're not to think of "people" every time we read the word star.

In Luke 10:18 Jesus speaks of Satan as "fallen from heaven like lightning." Fallen rather than falling. I think there's good reason to believe that he is the fallen star in Revelation 9:1.

Here's something of real importance in reflecting on the book. Mirror images occur all over the place. Here's what I mean. There's a Glorious Woman and there's an Evil Woman. There's a Glorious City and there's an Evil City. The followers of the Lamb have his name written on their foreheads (3:12 and 14:1) and the followers of the beast have the Beast's name written on their foreheads (13:16-17). The Christ claims to have been alive, dead and alive forever more (1:18) and there's a Beast that lived, died and lived again (13:3,14). And so on.

In this case we have a fallen star that has the key of the abyss (9:1,11) and we have the Bright and Morning Star that has the key of death and of hades (1:18 and 22:16). The fallen star has the key of the pit of evil from which he lets loose evil scorpions to torment the people of the earth. In opening the abyss the fallen star pollutes the air with smoke out of which come the destroying scorpions (9:2-11 and see Ephesians 2:2). Everything this "fallen star" is the Bright and Morning Star is not.

Jesus Christ as the church's Leader (19:11-16)

Leading his People into battle is the King on the white horse! He is called the King of Kings (19:16). He is identified as the Word of God (19:13 and see John 1:1,14). When he makes

war it is a righteous war (19:11). His followers and his Holy Father can depend on him because he is the Faithful and True (19:11). He leads the armies of heaven who wear white garments and ride white horses (19:14).

Jesus Christ as the Resurrected Lord (1:17-18)

The People of God, who will face death need to know that their Lord has faced death, fully experienced it and overcame it. Because that is so it's possible for him to call his followers to be faithful unto death and he would give them life as a crown (2:8,10).

Jesus Christ as the faithful Witness (1:5 and 19:11)

The days in which John wrote have been called "the age of the informer". A Roman historian called Tacitus said, "If a man had no enemies he was betrayed by a friend." In and out of the church people informed against each other to gain an advantage with the authorities. Sometimes they told blatant lies. But even if they told the truth they told it at someone's expense.

The word "witness" translates the Greek word *martus*. We get the word "martyr" from it. Jesus was one of those who took his words so seriously that he was willing to shed his blood (be a martyr—more than that, of course) to confirm the truth of what he spoke. If he promised something they could be sure they'd get it because he was a faithful witness. He would never lie to them or about them.

Jesus Christ as King of Kings (17:14 and 19:16)

John sees a throne in 4:2. It's the throne that rules the whole universe. The good news is that it is not in Italy, at Rome but in heaven. The good news is that on that throne that rules the universe no Roman Emperor sits. That is the throne of God and the kingdom (dominion) is the kingdom of heaven. At the center of that throne that rules the world John sees a Lamb (5:6). The Lamb bears the marks of having been slaughtered but it isn't lying dead! The Lamb that bears the slaughter wounds is "standing" at the heart of the throne.

The emperors would wade to the throne through the blood of others. The Lamb would gain his dominion through the free shedding of his own blood. They would lose their thrones when they died but the Lamb gained his through dying and was now deathless. They gained their thrones by laying down the lives of others and he gained his throne by laying down his own life for others (see Philippians 2:5-9).

Jesus Christ the Redeemer from Sin (1:5 and 5:9)

The Romans could offer jobs, roads, government, economic growth and even Roman citizenship to the right people but they couldn't give freedom from Sin. Jesus can do more than talk about sin! He can do more than describe it, condemn it, threaten it, denounce it, avoid it, analyze or expose it—praise God he can forgive it! And cure it!

Book of Revelation (5)

So far we've said that the book of Revelation was written nearly two thousand years ago and said it was dealing with things that were soon to happen because the time was near. So the book of Revelation mustn't be used to predict things that are supposed to be still ahead and in the very near future because the time is near.

We've said the book is written mainly in pictures and images rather than straight prose like, say, Genesis or Luke. So we aren't supposed to take the book literally. We're supposed to say, "That's what he saw, that's the image that was presented, now what do the images mean?"

Having acknowledged that the central character is God himself we looked at some of the major characters in the book. We glanced at Rome, presented by four images (including the great City). We glanced at the People of God under four images and Christ in five descriptions

and the Devil as the Dragon and the "fallen star" that had the key of the abyss. Let's take a look at some of the major symbols in the book. Resist the temptation (if it exists) to think you are reading what was literally to happen. Revelation describes the events and relationships and responses of God and people in images! The images are mostly taken from Old Testament scripture so we have a clue as to how they are functioning. For example, when you read of "plagues" you will think of Egypt and how the plagues functioned. So here we go.

Seals and Sealing (5:1-5,9 and 7:1-8)

In ancient times even as it is today in diplomatic and other circles some documents are places are marked as "off limits" to everyone except those who are authorized to be there or to handle this or that. The more powerful or important the person who put his seal on the document to say it was his, the less likely it was that the documents (or the place) would be interfered with. Rulers might throw a Daniel in a lion's den and put their royal seal on it (Daniel 6:17, and see Matthew 27:66). To "seal up" a document was to keep it from prying or curious eyes; it kept its contents secure.

So when we come across a document (a scroll) sealed with seals we're to know it is not to be trifled with or interfered with. The only allowed to remove seals is someone who is authorized or is powerful enough to face the consequences. This is what we find in 5:1-5,9. The "little book" (scroll) is the immediate destiny of the People of God. It is unrevealed and John is afraid it can't be opened but he hears that someone is "worthy" to "unseal" it. Picture a rolled up scroll and imagine seven clasps that hold it closed. Imagine someone tearing off one clasp and part of the scroll flapping back to reveal some of the writing that's on it. He tears off another and it flaps open even more and more until the whole contents are revealed. This is sort of what's pictured in this vision.

Remember: To seal is to mark it out as belonging to you. To seal is to forbid the unauthorized to interfere with it. To seal is both to protect and keep (in the case of writings) hidden. To tear off seals is to claim authority and (in the case of writings) it is to reveal. You'll remember that the 144,000 were sealed to mark them out as God's and the angel was told not to harm the sealed ones (7:2).

Trumpets and bowls (8:2 and 16:1-21)

In the ancient world and in biblical literature trumpets were used to call people to attention whether that meant to bring them into an assembly or raise an alarm. We read something of the purpose of trumpet blowing in Numbers 10:1-10. Bowls were used in the Old Testament for mixing wine, for carrying blood or oil (in connection with the sacrificial system). They'd put, let's say, wine or oil or incense in a bowl and would pour it out unto the Lord as an offering. Of course bowls were used for everyday purposes as well but in Revelation the stress is on activity in which God is involved so we're to see a temple, sacrificial setting.

The trumpets and bowls in Revelation introduce us to plagues that follow on the line of the plagues on Egypt. They are more intense than the plagues on Egypt and here and there you find an added element or two. If you read Exodus 7—10 you'll get the central thrust and function of the plagues mentioned in the book of Revelation.

John uses quite a bit of OT plague material but he uses only as much of it as he wishes. In the OT Egypt refused to recognize Yahweh (Exodus 3:19-20 and 7:5) and persecuted the People of God and God sent plagues on them both to appeal to them and punish them. You'll recall that each plague was a warning (a trumpet blast, so to speak) calling Egypt to obey God and let his People go free. In the book of Revelation Rome persecutes the People of God (and half the world) and God sends plagues on them both to warn and punish them (see Revelation 8:20-21). Like Egypt Rome will not pay attention so the full wrath of God is outpoured (the image is of bowls full of plague being emptied on the Empire).

In both Exodus and revelation we hear of water turned to blood, terrible locusts and body ulcers, of darkness and lightning and thunder and incredible hailstorms. Notice too that despite the limited punishments the oppressors will not repent and acknowledge God or his People (Exodus 8:15,19 and Revelation 9:20 and 16:9 illustrate the point).

When you read of trumpets and outpoured bowls think, "These are plagues on Rome just as there were plagues on Egypt." In Exodus the plagues were actual events while in Revelation they are images that carry the same message. God is against Rome as surely as he was against Egypt. You can see simply by reading Revelation that the plagues aren't literal events.

Measuring the temple (11:1-2)

Biblical characters measured things to separate them from what isn't measured. There's nothing strange about this. We do it all the time with things from wallpaper, to curtains to room-sizes and on and on. We measure 12 feet by 12 feet and say "that's the bedroom" and then 10 feet by 12 and say "that's the kitchen." Measuring is part of the process of separating and giving something special significance. Ezekiel 40—48 is one long measuring experience for the prophet because he watches a man measuring everything he comes across (40:2-3). In 42:20 we're told that the sanctuary area had a walled and measured square. It was measured "to separate the holy from the common." Measuring it made it different from the other areas that were not measured or were made distinct.

In Revelation 11:1-2 we have a picture of a temple. There was one word for the temple as a whole and another for the inner sanctuary, the heart of the temple ("naos"). The temple in the vision is to endure attack from enemies and the enemies are able to tread down the outer areas but they would not be allowed to breach the inner sanctuary.

You don't need to be told that the New Covenant People of God are seen also as the temple of God (compare 1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:21 and 1 Corinthians 3:16). Here we have another picture of the People of God being persecuted but protected, they suffer but they are sustained. This truth is told in the image of alien armies treading the outer courts without being able to breach the citadel. It was customary in ancient times to build temples on elevated ground and it was common for them to be well constructed, fort-like structures, well walled so it was possible for the perimeter to be breached and the heart to resist. Joshua took Jerusalem but it wasn't until many years later that David's general Joab took the citadel of Jerusalem from the Jebusites. During the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD the temple resisted for some time even after Jerusalem's walls were breached.

In the measuring imagery we find again the theme that runs throughout Revelation, persecution and protection, suffering and sustenance, trouble and triumph. In the vision the inner sanctuary is measured and no foreign foot treads in it though the area outside is trodden under. We are hearing that the trouble faced by the People of God is real but that it isn't the final word. The last word is with God and not the Roman legions or emperors!

The lake of fire (19:20 and 20:14-15)

The Bible teaches that some people will suffer eternal punishment (2 Thessalonians 1:9 and Matthew 25:46, eternal punishing is another matter). But that's not the point in the Revelation passages cited above. The lake of fire is another symbol that intends to convey the utter defeat and loss of God's enemies.

John borrows his imagery from the fate suffered by Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 19 and Jude 7). He also finds material in Isaiah 34:8-10, which prophesies the destruction of Edom. Isaiah isn't talking about the obliteration of the actual soil or land of Edom; he has in mind the social and kingdom fabric of the nation as a nation (so it is with the other kingdoms like Babylon, Egypt and Assyria and the like). When God judged Edom it wasn't turned into a literal lake of fire but that's how the prophet described it in 34:9-10. Here's what he says.

"Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch! It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever." What literally happened to Sodom is used by Isaiah to describe the fate of Edom when God completely judged her. John borrows the same language to describe the ultimate and utter defeat of Rome and all who assist her.

The fire is called "the second death" in Revelation 20:14 and 21:9. The first death is implied in 20:4-6. There we have two kinds of people that suffered death: the followers of Christ and the supporters of the beasts. For some comment on this section and the "first resurrection" go to [What's the first Resurrection?](#)

Remember: We are dealing with pictures, images! Beasts aren't literal, chains are literal, dragons aren't literal and lakes of fire aren't literal. It's the meaning we want.

Book of Revelation (6)

It's an overstatement but when you read books like 1 Samuel or Mark you read the words and know what the writer has in mind by the very words he uses. That's because, whatever the writer means to do with what he writes he tells of actual events and people doing this or saying that or going here or there. But that's now how it works in the book of Revelation. Revelation uses words to paint images and the reader has to ask, "What does the picture mean?" Anyone can tell you what the picture is (you only have to read it), but the issue is, what does the picture mean?

For example, John sees a seven-headed beast come up out of the sea in chapter 13:1. We aren't supposed to think that sometime, somewhere (past or future) an animal like that came or will come up out of the sea. No! We're supposed to look at the picture and ask, "What does the seven-headed sea-beast stand for?" The same is true of the Prostitute that rides the beast or the awful locusts or the terrifying plagues on the oceans, lakes and rivers of the world. In trying to understand Revelation (and, apart from some specific texts, it's not that difficult) the thing to say to ourselves is, "That's what he sees, now what does it mean?"

Let's take a look at three more important images used in Revelation.

A new heaven and earth (21:1)

John sees a new heaven and new earth come into existence. He sees a red Dragon with seven heads, he sees a Glorious Woman with the moon at her feet and a world entirely without drinking water and we asked, "what do these things mean?" Now he sees a new heaven and earth and what are we to do? We're to ask, "what does this mean?"

The vision of a new heaven and earth speaks of a new environment, a new state of affairs for the people of God. The old world in Revelation's context has been dominated by the cruel and evil Roman Empire—it was, so to speak, their world! But they offended God and he attacked it. In Revelation its stars are torn down, its seas are turned to blood, earthquakes tore it in shreds and its vegetation is completely destroyed—the Roman world is dismantled. None of that literally happened! John now sees a new heaven and earth. But as surely as we're not to believe in the literal dismantling of the Roman world (remember 22:6,10) we're not to believe in a literal creating of a new heaven and earth. This is a book of pictures! It tells its message in images. It isn't like other books and mustn't be interpreted like other books. When Matthew says they met a man carrying a water pitcher on his head we tend to believe that that's what they actually saw. When John says he saw a door open in heaven or that he saw a new city coming down out of the sky on to the earth we're not supposed to take it as literal.

The vision of the new heaven and earth is Revelation's way of saying that the People of God live to see the destruction of the world "owned" and shaped by the beast-empire of Rome.

They are free from Rome. Rome can no longer murder them or make them cry or mourn (21:4). There is no more sea (21:1) therefore the Roman beast can rise from it no more (13:1).

The dismantling of the world of the oppressor is a common vision in Old Testament prophets. Babylon's world is dismantled in Isaiah 13 and 14. Edom's world is devastated in Isaiah 34:4-15. Judah's world is "uncreated" in Jeremiah 4:22-26 and so on. In none of these cases are we to think of a literal destruction of the world. Can you imagine what would happen if a star the size of Mount Everest fell on an earth the size of a grain of sand just so Edom could be destroyed?

A new and glorious Jerusalem (21:2,9)

The city that dominated the world in John's day was Rome (see 17:18). Nations walked according to her laws and nations brought their wealth into it. She persecutes the Church in defiance of God and the world saw her as unbeatable but her wicked crumbled around her and her city went up in flames her (read the whole of chapter 18 and 21:1).

In her place John sees another city. He sees it coming down from heaven on to the earth. This city is not of earthly origin, men didn't build it, God did (compare Hebrews 11:10,16). It sits on the new earth (21:24) and it's called the new Jerusalem (21:2,9). That's what John sees. What does this city stand for?

Whatever it is it isn't heaven! John tells us it is the bride of the Lamb, the wife of Christ (21:9-10). The bride, the wife of Christ is the Church, the People of God (see Ephesians 5:29-32 and 2 Corinthians 11:2). We aren't supposed to think this is a literal city that sometime in the past or in the future comes down out of heaven and settles on the earth (remember the dimensions of it?). That misses the point altogether. John is contrasting the wicked City that went down in flames to utter ruin and this one that is glorious and beautiful and invulnerable to attack. Notice how the images switch between a woman and a city; that's what they did in chapter 17 when discussing the Prostitute and the city that ruled the world. This glorious city is no more literal than the new heaven and earth.

The message in this section is this: When the smoke clears there is one glorious city and it came down out of heaven to take its place in a new environment. That environment is free from the Roman oppressor and the city they claimed was "the eternal city" was now gone. The glorious city is a picture of the triumphant People of God and much of the imagery is taken from the Old Testament (see Isaiah 54:11-12 for example).

Her identity is spelled out (21:9). Her dimensions we've talked about earlier. She brings light and healing to the nations of the world (21:24 and 22:2). There are those who say that the city is literal, that it is sitting even now (yes!) ready to come down and sit on the earth. John expressly tells us it is not a city! It is the wife of the Lamb! It isn't heaven, it isn't a literal city and it isn't even a literal wife of anyone. It's God's People in and through Jesus Christ and they are pictured as gloriously triumphant over their enemy (Rome, inspired by Satan).

A home within the wilderness (12:6,14)

The glorious Woman of 12:1-2 is the People of God (see Revelation 3). In 12:6 and 14 she is forced to flee into the wilderness. But in the wilderness she is taken care of for a time, times and half a time. This phrase will be discussed in Revelation (7) along with some other numbers.

Israel, the ancient People of God, experienced a wilderness period. John borrows some from their experience. Elijah, one of God's prophets and witnesses, had his own wilderness experience during a three and a half-year drought. In both cases the people of God endured a wilderness experience but in both cases God looked after his troubled people. See Deuteronomy 8:2-5 and 1 Kings 17:1-16.

We have the trouble/triumph and suffering-but-sustained theme again. The Woman flees to the wilderness and that's not the South of France or Acapulco but while she is there

God protects and provides for her. Via these images the church of God is told tough times are ahead so they shouldn't be surprised but they're assured that wherever they are God will be with them to protect and bring them through to victory. That is the message of the home in the wilderness for three and a half-years.

The battle of Armageddon (16:12-16 and 19:11-21)

The battle of Armageddon is introduced in 16:12-16 but it is fought in 19:11-21. In 16:12-16 we're told it is between "the kings from the East (sun-rising)" and the two beasts and their allies. In 19:11-21 we're told it is between the People of God led by Jesus Christ and the two beasts and their allies. What does that tell you?

It tells you that the kings from the sun-rising in 16:12 are the People of God. Jesus himself is said to be the Bright and Morning Star (22:16 and see Malachi 4:2) and his followers are the kings from the sun-rising. It's from the East that the sun rises into the sky and floods the earth with light.

In 16:12 we hear that these royal ones (compare 5:10 and 1 Peter 2:9) cross water on dry ground. In the Bible only the People of God do such a thing. They did it in the days of Moses, and under Joshua. Elijah did it and so did Elisha. And when God speaks of rescuing his people from their enemies he speaks about bringing them across water on dry ground (Isaiah 11:15). These kings advance from the sun-rising to dispel darkness from the earth. See Psalm 110:1-3 and read the description of the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19, noting especially 19:8.

And why Armageddon? It is a huge valley in Palestine where ancient armies fought. Israel gained famous victories there under Deborah and Gideon. A Bible dictionary would tell you the derivation of Armageddon and say something about the strategic importance of the town of Megiddo and its association with the plain or valley. Those having some acquaintance with the OT would have known immediately what was meant when a battle of Armageddon was mentioned. In Revelation the battle pictures Rome led by Satan losing a pitched battle against the Church led by Jesus Christ.

Book of Revelation (7)

Numbers and the book of Revelation

In Revelation numbers have meanings! In general, throughout the Bible when you read of a man having five sons or that someone traveled nine days you can be sure the man had five sons and the traveler traveled nine days. In the book of Revelation (and other apocalyptic material) you occasionally come across numbers which have no special significance but that's unusual. Usually the numbers are giving us a message. I'll illustrate this as we go along.

Some lover in ancient Pompeii scribbled this on a wall. "I love a girl whose number is 545." That wasn't her phone number or "vital statistics". In ancient languages the letters of the alphabet were also numbers and (presumably) the lover in Pompeii was scribbling her initials. Recently the number "10" has become common in our vocabulary to rate the looks or figure of a girl. In gymnastics it is the number of a flawless performance. The ancients did similar things with their numbers depending on their background and experience. The Hebrews certainly did.

What follows is a brief glance at some of the more important numbers used in biblical texts—numbers that carried messages in them. Sometimes it's possible to make sense of how the numbers came to suggest the "message" and at other times we only know they have that significance but we don't know how they came to get it.

The number seven

The number seven speaks of completeness, perfection and fullness. It relates to that which lacks nothing but it's all there. Seven describes the totality of a thing and it's probably

the most prominent number in Revelation. When John wants us to know that Christ dwells in the entire church he has his walking amidst "seven" churches (1:12,13,20 and 2:1). Christ's fullness of power is described in terms of "seven horns" (5:6 horn is another symbol—of strength and authority) and when he is said to have the fullness of the Spirit and God's gifts, without limit, we're told he has "the seven spirits of God" (5:6, compare Isaiah 11:1-3). His complete wisdom and vision is described by saying he has seven eyes (5:6). Seven seals perfectly conceal the book and ripping off seven seals is a full revealing of its contents. Seven trumpets are a full warning (8:2) and seven outpoured bowls are the full wrath of God (15:1, 16:1). When Christ calls his people to forgive "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22) he calls for forgiveness without limit.

The power and authority of the beast is described in terms of seven heads. Not only does that speak of seven actual emperors and hills (17:9,10) it says that as a bestial kingdom he is full of power. There's no suggestion that he has power equal to Christ only that within his own sphere he is full of power.

It isn't difficult to see how "seven" could come to stand for completeness. It was after six days of work that God rested on the seventh because his creative work was completed. The seventh day completes a week. Seven and its multiples came to stand for a condition, a state of affairs, a situation that speaks of "that's all!"

The number three and a half

Christ's power and authority is symbolized by seven and when contrasted with Christ's the beast's power is three and a half. Three and a half is a broken seven. Three and a half is said to be a time, (two) times and half a time (12:6,14). The equivalent phrase is 1,260 days (12:6), forty-two months (11:2 and 13:5). The Jews worked on a thirty day month and added an intercalary month to bring their years up to a solar year.

Twelve hundred and sixty days is forty-two months and that is three and a half years or time, times and half a time. We know these to be interchangeable for several reasons. In 12:6 we're told the Woman flees to the wilderness for 1,260 days and in 12:14 we're told she's there for time, times and half a time. The beast is given authority for forty-two months which is $42 \times 30 + 1,260$. The armies of the beast tread down the temple for forty-two months though they are unable to take the citadel and during that period the two Witnesses preach for 1,260 days (11:3). When the Witnesses are slain they aren't dead for a full week (a seven) but for three and a half days and then they live again (11:9).

If someone asked you to describe Christ's power and authority with a number, in Revelation terms you would say it was a seven. When you describe the beast's power and authority as limited and not complete you'd describe it with the number three and a half. Three and a half speaks of limitation! The Woman is really troubled but it's only for 1,260 days (three and a half years). The Witnesses wear sackcloth (a symbol of mourning and suffering) while they preach but it's only for 1,260 days or forty-two months or three and a half years (11:3,9,11). Three and half speaks of limitation! It speaks of a state of affairs where the people of God are troubled but they are triumphant, they suffer but are supported, they are down but they are never out.

In 1 Kings 17 we have the story of the drought that lasted for three and a half years (see James 5:17 and Luke 4:25). During that time God preserved his prophet and fed him in the wilderness via ravens, a poor widow and God's miraculous provision. So you have both the trial and the provision. This story no doubt contributed to the use of three and a half years in the way we see it here. (It's the kind of thing that happened to the number forty.) Be sure to look again at Lesson 3 and refresh your mind about the Woman and the Witnesses.

The number 6

The number six stands for Man. The number seven functions as perfection and six falls short of that (see Romans 3:23). Man was created on the sixth day (Genesis 1:26,31). In Revelation 13:18 John gives the beast's number as "six, six, six". The whole world is afraid of the beast and worships him. He claims godhood and professes to be unstoppable, lord of the eternal city. But the people of God are assured that there's nothing to be afraid of and there's certainly nothing to be worshiped! The beast is human and evil. In Daniel 7:17 it is one of four that rises "from the earth" in contrast to the Son of Man who rides on the clouds of heaven and goes to the Ancient of Days who gives him his authority (7:13-14). Those kingdoms are bestial and he is human. They are of the earth and his kingdom is the kingdom of heaven. They are anti-God and he is the Servant of the one true God.

When John describes the beast's power he says it's three and a half and when he describes the beast nature and character he says he is six, six, six. The tripled six may well be because Rome is present in a threefold way—sea beast, earth beast and prostitute (city).

The number of the beast, he tells us (13:18) is "man's number." He doesn't mean a man, as in a specific person. There is no indefinite article in Greek and only the context determines whether we should supply one or not. Here six, six, six is not the number of a man, it is the number of Man. You can see this illustrated in Galatians 3:15 where "even if it is a man's covenant" doesn't mean a particular person—it means "even if it is a covenant that humans make" (he's comparing it with a covenant God has made). And take a look at Revelation 21:17.

The number one thousand

Like seven there is the notion of fullness and completeness in the number 1,000 but it appears that the number 1,000 deals with that concept on a larger scale. Psalm 50:10 has God claiming that the cattle on a thousand hills are his. What about the cattle on hill 1,001? There his too but he doesn't need to go around saying, "And that's mine, and that too and those over there." Claiming to own the cattle on a thousand hills is a claim to all of them. He claims to be faithful to a thousand generations (Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 7:9 and elsewhere). What about poor generation 1,001? He's faithful to them too because his faithfulness knows no limit. One thousand may well mean one thousand in many texts but the context usually makes that clear since it will occur in historical books rather than poetic or apocalyptic. When it's carrying a message it speaks of what is unreserved and complete, without limit. Hitler used to say he would establish a kingdom that would last a thousand years. Presumably it added nothing to go higher than that.

When we read in Revelation 20:1-3 of the Devil's defeat as lasting one thousand years we're not being given chronology or a date on a calendar. A thousand generations was not offering a cut-off date and a thousand years in Revelation 20 isn't either. Remember Revelation tells its message in symbols and signs. When it describes the beast's limited authority it calls it a three and a half-year authority. When it describes the Devil's defeat or the victory of the saints it calls them "a thousand year defeat" or a "thousand year reign" (20:4-6).

The death of the Witnesses is robbed of its power by being called a "three and a half-day" death (11:9-12) but the death of the beast's allies is hammered home by being seen as a "thousand year death" (20:4-6). This has nothing to do with dates on a calendar!

Here's the question: when the smoke has cleared from the battle in chapter 19 has the Devil been defeated in his use of Rome? Yes! Or has he just lost a skirmish in that battle? No skirmish! In that phase of his defiance of God—using Rome as his tool—he was not only staggered he was thoroughly beaten! How does John say those words I just uttered? He paints a picture of chains, a hole in the earth and a thousand-year incarceration.

When the smoke from the battle in chapter 19 has cleared have the People of God triumphed over the beasts and the Dragon that used them? Yes! Or was it just that they had

gained an edge and the brawl wasn't done? They didn't gain "an edge". They triumphed unreservedly! And how does John say the words I just said? He paints a picture of saints sitting enthroned with Christ for 1,000 years.

As far as his use of Rome is concerned Satan was decisively and utterly defeated. But might there be other enemies through whom he would attack God by attacking his People? No doubt but Satan's future failure and utter loss is assured. How is that said? First the image of 1,000 years is allowed to run its course so that the truth it has to tell is not obscured and then another image is presented. A "little season" (as distinct from 1,000 years), Satan gathers an army of staggering proportions, attacks the people of God, God's judgement falls and the lake of fire receives the Devil and all his allies (20:7-15).

The number eight

The number eight is the number of a new beginning. It's the day that begins a new week after seven days. It's the Jubilee years that follows forty nine years and when everyone gets a new start, when all debts are cancelled and all property goes back to the original owners. It's the day of circumcision when the child enters into a new relationship with God. Early Christians called it the first day and the eighth. Christ was raised on the first day of the week. The New Covenant people began on Pentecost day, on the first day of the week. Early churches built their baptisteries with eight sides stressing the truth that the penitent believer had now risen to live again in his new and resurrected Lord. In the Sibylline Oracles Christ's is given the number 888. The number of resurrection.

In Revelation 17:11 the sea-beast has an eighth head. It is Domitian, the emperor in whom persecution of the Christians began again. Nero has persecuted God's people and died (see 11:7, 13:3,11 and 17:11). With him the beast died but with Domitian it came alive again. Remember these are pictorial ways of telling truths. The images are not literally fulfilled! With the death of Nero persecution of the saints ceased but in Domitian Nero (as it were) is risen from the dead. Tertullian in the 2nd century calls him a limb of the bloody Nero. In the 3rd century Eusebius calls him the successor to Nero.

Book of Revelation (8)

It's time we took a look at how the book hangs together. If we can remember the place given to each of the main characters and images it shouldn't be too difficult to gain at least an overall view of where the book's going and how it develops its message.

Introduction: chapter 1

The seven churches addressed: chapters 2-3

The throne and its occupants: chapter 4-5

The Seals: chapter 6

The People of God assured: chapter 7

The trumpets: chapters 8-9

A solemn warning and commission: chapter 10

The People of God are assured: chapters 11-12

The two beasts: chapter 13

The People of God are assured: chapters 14-15

The bowls of wrath: chapter 16

The great Prostitute/City: chapters 17-18

Celebration and then Armageddon: chapter 19

The vision of victory: chapter 20

The triumphant church in a new world: chapters 21-22

The introduction

The introduction takes up the whole first chapter. When you go back to read chapter 1, having gained some sense of how things are developed, chapter 1 is deeper and richer than before. All the themes that are developed in the book are hinted at in chapter 1. See if you don't find this to be true in your own study of the book.

The Revelation (unveiling) from God concerns things that are soon to transpire because the time was near. It came from the triune God (1:4) and it came to John while he was in prison. Precisely how he ended up there we're not sure. Was there some local tyrant that vented his spite rather than some official policy? Who knows, but it worked out that he was there to receive the Revelation (1:9). His first vision is the resurrected Lord who twice tells him to record everything he sees and that includes the commission to write it down (1:11,19).

The Lord is dressed in high-priestly garments (1:13), his white hair speaks of majesty and purity and his burning eyes say he can see into the heart of things (1:14). His bronze feet can tread down enemies (1:15 and see Micah 4:13) while his word pierces in judgement (compare Hebrews 4:12). He has experienced death and conquered both it and Hades (1:18). He speaks the truth in an age of liars who inform on others and he's the ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5). He loves his people, forgives their sins and gives them purpose to their lives (1:6). He dwells in the church, which is imaged as a seven branched-candlestick (1:13,20). Although the latter is written to seven actual churches in Asia Minor (1:11) the seven reminds us that it speaks to the universal church (see Lesson 7 on the number seven).

All these qualities would be especially comforting to the Christians who were about to undergo persecution by the Roman Empire. Those who would be lied about know He speaks the truth. Those who were to die would know that He has conquered death. And so on.

The seven churches addressed

Each letter is addressed to "the angel" of the church (2:1). Everything in the book has an "angel" whether it is a river, a book, the wind, trumpet or plague. The angel of a thing is the inner nature of that thing. It is the essence and heart of the thing. When he writes to the churches he writes to what they really are rather than what they appear to be (see 1:16,20 and 2:2,9,13). The constant "I know" reminds them that he isn't fooled by appearances.

The Lord commends each church where he can, then he rebukes them if he must, appeals to them and warns them. He threatens the disobedient that he will "come" and deal with them if they don't repent (2:5,16,25 and 3:3,11,20). This means the "comings" may or may not happen. We need to examine the "comings" of the Lord in their contexts.

The over-comers are those who remain faithful during this time of trial. They will be vindicated and blessed with things like white stones (2:17), immunity from the second death (2:11), reigning with Christ (2:26-27) and so forth. But overcoming implies that there is a test ahead.

The throne and its occupants

Chapters 4 and 5 go together. They are placed at the beginning to assure the saints that whatever they hear after this, everything is going to be all right. The throne that rules the universe is not in Rome, Italy, where the emperors bear rule. The world is ruled from heaven and heaven is open to the People of God (4:1-2) who in Revelation are called "those that dwell in heaven" (12:12; 13:6 and see Philippians 3:20). Note that those who are allied to and worship the beast are said to be "dwellers on the earth" (13:8,12 and 14). Around the throne there is a rainbow (see Genesis 9:12-16) and there too are the living creatures (the cherubim) who are the executors of God retributive justice (see Ezekiel chapter 1 and elsewhere). The church is there represented by twenty-four elders dressed in priestly white. They are crowned with stephanoi, the crowns of overcomers, rather than the diadems of titled kings, and they reign with God (see 3:5,21 and 4:4). Chapter 4 has God as Creator and chapter 5 has God as

Redeemer (see 5:6). In the middle of the throne that rules the world is the self-giving Lord in the image of a lamb. It bears the marks of having been slain and yet it is standing and reveals the immediate destiny of the saints by removing the seals from "the little book"(5:1-5). Then a song of praise goes up and redemption is acknowledged (5:9-12).

These two chapters strengthen the disciples in the face of what is to follow.

The seals are removed

Remember that to remove seals from a document (a scroll) is to reveal the contents of that book. The removal of the first seal reveals Jesus Christ as a warrior going forth conquering and to conquer (6:2). In the book of Revelation only the "good guys" wear white or ride white horses. In the whole book of Revelation only one other white horse is singled out and its rider is the Word of God (19:11) and he leads his followers on white horses (19:14). So whatever else is revealed when the seals are ripped off, everything is going to be okay.

The second and third seals are torn away and they show great trouble that is soon to begin. The seals reveal that war, Death and Hades will slay many people using the sword, famine, plague and wild beasts (6:3-8). But Ezekiel calls these destroying elements, the "four sore judgments of God" (14:21). So these awful events are not just "bad luck" and while evil people are involved in bringing them about they are the holy judgments of God. So in the face of these the saints are still to trust because in the course of this trial on the earth many believers would die (6:9) and these are shown under the fifth seal with a question for God. The question is would the ungodly get away with it? The righteous are called to be patient until God fulfils his purpose through the evil ones (6:11) since God would render judgment that would right all wrongs and this judgment is shown under the sixth seal (6:12-17).

The people of God are assured

Here is a pattern that exists throughout the book of Revelation. Because the saints are to face a profoundly trying time they are given numerous visions to assure them that they are safe in God's hands (notice this in the outline). Under the sixth seal a horrific judgment is to come on the earth and the People of God are assured that they are exempt from the judgment. Not exempt from the pain that is generated by the judgment. It would be helpful if you went back and refreshed your mind about the 144,000 in Lesson 2. The sixth seal closes with the question in 6:17, "Who is able to stand?" and chapter 7 answers, "Those who are God's and wear his mark." So the judgment is announced and now it begins with the trumpets.

The trumpets are blown

The seventh seal reveals seven trumpets. These are warning judgments. And as the seventh seal contains the seven trumpets so the seventh trumpet will contain the seven bowls (8:1 and 10:7). The trumpets take the form of plagues and we're reminded of the plagues that fell on Egypt when God warned them to let his people go free. (See this discussed in lesson 5.) But as in the case of Egypt so it is with Rome; they did not repent despite the warning judgments (9:21).

A solemn warning and commission

Since they won't repent they will be warned no more (10:6). A mighty angel has a new commission for John. The commissioning takes the form of eating a book (10:8-11 and see Ezekiel 2:8—3:3). He is to tell his message of judgment wherever he goes through the whole Roman world and to its allies. Isaiah in chapter 6 had a similar message to carry to Israel—a message of judgment that would be preached until cities were devastated.

Book of Revelation (9 of 9)

Assuring God's People

The terrible warning plagues of chapters 8 and 9 should have brought the followers of the Dragon to repentance but they didn't. We'd have thought the same about the earlier plagues on Egypt but for one reason or another humans find grounds for not repenting. Impenitence and defiance at this level generates fear by its blind and savage "no surrender" character. Since the enemy is so bent on evil the righteous need to be assured and that's what chapters 11 and 12 do.

In chapter 11 God's people (the temple and city) are seen trodden under by the enemy but their center can't be taken—the inner sanctuary remains untaken. God's people (the two Witnesses) may wear sackcloth all the while they preach during the enemy's "time" of power (forty-two months, 1,260 days—see Lesson 7) but they can't be stopped in their proclamation. And when it seems they have been stopped by being killed, they are dead for only three and a half days before being resurrected (see Lesson 3).

In chapter 12 the People of God (the glorious Woman and her seed) endure a wilderness experience but they are protected and nourished while they are there. In chapter 12 the Dragon loses against the Woman, against the single Child and against God's servant, Michael the archangel. The Dragon is presented as a three-time loser. See Lesson 3 again. All this assurance is needed in light of chapters 8 and 9 and in light of the two beasts about to be described.

The two beasts

No wonder the righteous need assuring because chapter 13 shows them the true nature of the enemy opposing them. The sea-beast is Rome as the powerful brute kingdom and the earth-beast is Rome as the sly religious kingdom. See Lesson 2 again.

John mentions its seven heads in 13:1. In 17:9-10 we're told that these heads represent two things. They represent the hills on which the Harlot sits (coins and etchings shows Rome as built on seven hills) and they represent seven kings. The seven kings/emperors are 1) Augustus, 2) Tiberias, 3) Caligula, 4) Claudius, 5) Nero, 6) Vespasian and 7) Titus. [Three are excluded from the list. The three excluded are three who ruled (more or less) during the period of civil war between the death of Nero and Vespasian's coming to the throne. See Daniel 7:8,20. I've developed all this somewhat in a couple of books on Daniel and on Revelation. You might be interested in checking them out.]

But John mentions an "eighth" king in 17:11. His name is Domitian who was both the 11th emperor and "the eighth". Be sure to see Lesson 7 and the brief discussion of the number "eight". With the death of Nero the persecution of Christians ceased and with the accession of Domitian it was renewed.

John describes the beast in this way in 11:7, 13:3,12 and 17:8. He says it has three phases. It was, it is not and it is about to come up out of the abyss to make war on the saints. It was a brute beast against God's people in Nero but the head was slain and the beast "dies". While John writes the book he says the beast "is not" (17:11). Note that he says the beast is not even though he says there is an emperor reigning ("one is"—17:10). While John writes there is a Roman emperor but he is not persecuting the Christians (the brute beast "is not" because it died in Nero) but the brute beast is about to resurrect. You'll certainly have recognized that this is a parody of the career and experience of the true Lord who lived, died and is alive forever more.

"Five are fallen" (17:10). Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero. "One is" (17:10)—that's Vespasian. "One is not yet come but when he comes he must continue a little while" (17:10)—that's Titus who reigned for a little over two years. Then came Domitian. He

began a persecution that became more and more severe and only ended in 311 AD with the Edict of Toleration under Galerius and Constantine. John takes Domitian as the fitting representative of all that Rome was and stood for.

The ten horns of the beast are the "client kings of Rome". See any standard history of Rome. I've developed this some in the comments on Daniel 2:40-43 and Daniel 11. Revelation tells us that these are kings that gave their authority to the beast (13:1 and 17:12-18). In the purposes of God this is how Rome was destroyed. She disintegrated from within (see 17:12-18).

More assurance for the People of God

Chapter 13 brings a fearful message indeed but chapters 14 and 15 lift the hearts of God's people. John sees the 144,000 (Lesson 2) marked with God's name rather than the name or number of the beast (see 13:16-18—there's nothing here about credit card account numbers or modern governments tattooing ID numbers on anyone). The 144,000, faithful and victorious, are singing.

Four angels (14:6,8,9,17) proclaim good news about the imminent fall of Babylon (Rome). The headlines they announce are fulfilled one by one in the rest of the book. The evil City is going to fall (14:8 and chapter 18). The beast's worshipers will be judged (14:9-12 and 20:11-15) and the righteous are to be gathered in like wheat to a barn (14:13-16, and compare chapters 21-22).

Chapter 15 announces the arrival of the seven angels who have the final plagues, the full outpouring of God's wrath (15:1,7-8). These, you'll remember, follow because the trumpets had failed to bring the beast and its allies to repentance.

The bowls of wrath are poured out

The bowls look like the trumpets only they are more severe. Remember, we're to think of the plagues on Egypt and that will tell us what is happening here and how the plagues function. All these are pictures! We aren't supposed to take them literally! Be sure to see Lesson 6 and the remarks on Armageddon.

Bear in mind the the Woman of chapter 17 is a great City. She is the City that rules the world in John's day (17:18) and she is built on seven hills (17:9). She's the world's leading commercial power (chapter 18) and not a Church! In chapter 18 she is burned with fire. Nero set fire to Rome and it survived but God would set fire to it and it wouldn't survive. Nero blamed the Christians for the fire and they didn't do it but the God of the Christians sets this fire—he did do it!

Celebration and then Armageddon

The celebration in 19:1-10 takes place even before the battle of Armageddon is fought. That speaks of assurance. The armies in the battle are named (in keeping with chapter 16) and an angel proclaims the result even before the war commences (19:17-18). The evil army is defeated, the two beasts are thrown into the lake of fire (19:19-20) and their followers are killed by Christ (19:21). Rome has perished! She is no more, she has been thrown into the lake of fire and can never again be a threat.

The vision of victory—the triumph described

In Revelation the Dragon works through Rome! At other times in the past he worked through others. In the future he will have to work through others because in Revelation he works through Rome and Rome perished. The defeat of the Dragon in Revelation is the defeat of the Dragon in his use of Rome! That defeat was not partial—it was utter! Complete! Final! So it is described as a 1,000 years incarceration. The victory of God's people over Rome is not partial or "something of" but a total and unlimited triumph so it is described as a reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:4-6 answers the question, "Yes, but what about those who were faithful unto death in the conflict with Rome?" John is given another vision (in addition to chapter 19

and 20:1-3). It's a picture that tells a truth! The picture is the apocalyptic way of saying that those who die in Christ and for righteousness are victorious. Those who die for Rome and unrighteousness are losers!

The resurrection image is not uncommon. See Ezekiel 37:1-14 for an extended illustration of this point. See too Colossians 2:12—3:3, Romans 6:1-7 and John 5:25-27 for the same thing.

In Revelation 20:4-6 see what John is seeing. First, with the war of chapter 19 as background, simply ask yourself what it is that John sees. There's a battlefield with thousands of dead scattered all over the place. As he watches many of them come to life and join others sitting on thrones and they reign with Christ 1,000 years. The rest of the dead that are scattered about the battlefield remain dead all the while the saints are reigning in triumph. Then they rise from the dead only to be judged and to die again in the lake of fire (20:5,11-15). In the picture there are two resurrections. One is to life and triumph—that's the one he sees "first". The one he sees next is "after" the 1,000 years because the first resurrection picture only pictures the followers of the Christ. That 1,000 year reign tells their story in imagery. The second resurrection to a second endless death is the story of the followers of the beast told in imagery. These visions are not a description of literal and actual events. Chaining a Dragon and throwing him into a hole and putting a lid on him for 1,000 isn't the description of literal events!

20:7-10 must occur after the thousand years. Why is that? Because the image of a 1,000 year imprisonment must be allowed it's message. You can't have him free and active during the 1,000 years because that would contradict the inner structure of the scenes. You can't have the evil dead living during the 1,000 year reign of the saints because that is the image reserved to tell the story of the saints. So, as the visions unfold, Satan is pictured as freed for a little while, getting an army from the four corners of the earth but it's all to no avail. (I've developed the Gog Magog image a bit in a book on Ezekiel that you might be interested in looking at. If interested call: 877-792-6408.)

This vision functions in this way. It assures the People of God that it makes no difference how, when or where Satan might show himself, he loses and they win. This is not a prediction of a still future war it is God saying to his people, "It doesn't matter when or where or how Satan appears—your future is secure and his final end is destruction!"

The triumphant and glorious church

When the smoke clears we find the New Jerusalem (the Church, the wife of Christ) not in rags or blood-spattered but looking like a bride (21:2). That's the city that John sees in 21:9-10. It isn't a literal city! It's the wife of the Lamb. Be sure to see Lesson 3 on this.

While John is dealing with eternal realities he isn't dealing with a period of time in eternity. You'll notice that there are still nations to whom the City gives light (21:24). You'll notice that the nations still need to gain health and that the City provides it (22:2). You'll notice that nations still bring their riches to the City and you'll notice that someone could lose his or her share to the Tree of Life (22:19). In eternity?

No, John is certainly dealing with eternal truths and eternal realities but he is describing the triumphant state of the church. By God's redeeming and sustaining grace it has come through its trial with the brutal beast-kingdom Rome. This demonstrates what was already true—that the dominion belongs to the Lord and his Christ.

This is timeless truth! Every judgment rendered by God is a shadow and a "prophecy" of the final and complete judgment when evil will be totally obliterated. Rome (like Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and the rest) is a perfect illustration in the history of the world of the coming obliteration of all evil. But it's more than an illustration, it is meant to proclaim the certainty of a future glorious finale. But Revelation, like Nahum and other OT books, relates to a definitive

judgment in time past. And the glory of the triumphant church in Revelation relates to its victory over Rome. It speaks as surely now as it did then.

[You might be interested in having these lessons on Revelation in outline and correspondence course form. If so, email BJPAINE@aol.com.]

Further Remarks on the Revelation

Remarks on the nature of apocalyptic literature

1. It's important to remember that the Book of Revelation is prophetic even while it is apocalyptic (1:3 and 22:7-10) which means that one does not exclude the other. But the apocalyptic style of literature is distinctive. You know it when you read it. It has a lot in common with other forms of prophetic literature and parables and it depends on the reader knowing something about biblical history and what is going on in their world. In this way it is like other biblical writings. Just the same, while it does connect with other styles of writing, it is distinctive. You can go through the Bible and, most of the time, pick out the sections that are apocalyptic in nature.

2. Whatever else is true, apocalyptic literature isn't plain prose. Read Daniel chapter 3 and then read chapter 7. You don't have to be an Einstein to note the difference. In one case the writer tells us what literally happened and he tells it without the use of bizarre images. In the other the writer tells us of events or persons of the past, present and future and uses speech he doesn't want us to take literally. (Note the lion with eagle's wings and the leopard with four heads as illustrating the point.)

3. In apocalyptic literature God is always revealed as Sovereign and in control even in the face of entrenched evil and abusive governments. See Revelation 1:4 and 4:11 and 6:10 and see Daniel chapter 4.

4. In apocalyptic literature a writer may use extraordinary people from the past to describe the present or the future. (Examples would include Israel's wilderness experience and Elijah and Elisha as "the two witnesses".)

5. In apocalyptic literature a writer uses categories of uncreation and renewal (new creation) to make his points. Genesis 1 speaks of sun, moon and stars having their place in heaven and behaving in an orderly fashion but in apocalyptic literature heavens are rolled up, stars fall and immovable mountains tumble into the seas.

6. In apocalyptic literature writers reveal states of affairs or the inner character of something or they explain the working of ordinary events in terms of their spiritual meaning. And they normally do this by using imagery. (For example: the Roman Empire is pictured as the great Prostitute and the "earth beast" is a lamb with a dragon's voice.)

7. In apocalyptic literature a writer may use past events as models to describe coming judgment or blessing. (One illustration of this from among many would be the plagues of Egypt as they are used in Revelation.)

8. In apocalyptic literature human sin is linked with the original rebellion against God. As in Genesis we find God "uncreating" (see Noah's flood and the waters coming back up over the earth to create a deep as in Genesis 1:1) so in apocalyptic judgments local rebellions result in uncreation. Isaiah 34 and the judgment on Edom illustrates the point. So also Revelation 6 and the judgment there.

9. In apocalyptic literature sin is shown to have cosmic effects and not just personal. We tend to think that sin only affects us personally but in this kind of literature we're taught that it tears down the heavens and pollutes the entire world (compare Genesis 3:17-19 and Colossians 1:19-20). As described in images oceans are turned to dead man's blood, skies are rolled up and the planet is torn apart.

10. In apocalyptic literature numbers and colours are also used to convey truths. Some of the more obvious numbers are 7 and 12 and 1,000. Illustrations are everywhere. Comment later.

11. In apocalyptic literature everything has an angel. Winds, rivers, books and congregations have angels. In such cases the angels stand for "the inner nature or function" of the thing itself. The angel is "the spirit of" the thing. For example, when Christ speaks to the "angel of the church" he is speaking to the church as it really is rather than how it looks externally.

12. The notion that apocalyptic language was chosen so that the enemies couldn't understand it doesn't make a lot of sense. Very often the writer explains what he has said under an image. Very often the writer explains the vision he has just given. Sometimes the writer himself doesn't understand the vision or the image. Besides, it wouldn't be difficult for an enemy to torture a believer and make him or her reveal the meaning.

Whatever else is true apocalyptic language sticks in the memory. Think of the images in the parables as examples.

Whatever else is true an image can make an abstract truth concrete. For example, to say a kingdom is savage and ruthless is one thing and to describe it in an image as a devouring beast makes the description come alive.

Whatever else is true the images correspond to the underlying truth. For example a "lamb" suggests one thing and a lamb that speaks like a dragon suggests something else (see Revelation 13:11).

13. The Book of Revelation is not only written in apocalyptic style, it is an apocalypse. That is, it is an "unveiling, a disclosing or a revealing." And we are supposed to take to heart what is written in it if we are to be blessed by God (1:3 and 22:7). The readers are called to "keep the words of the prophecy of this book." So the book is not a conundrum or a puzzle to be solved. It is truth that readers are to give their hearts to.

The Authors of the Book of Revelation

1. **The apostle John.** Revelation 1:4 and 11. John is the merely human by which the book of Revelation came to us. He received it when he was on the island of Patmos on the Lord's day (1:9). John describes himself in several ways in the introduction.

He is the bondservant of Jesus Christ in 1:1

He is a witness to what he saw and heard of God's word in 1:2

He is a brother in Christ in 1:9

He is a fellow-sufferer in 1:9

He is a brother in the kingdom of Christ in 1:9

He is a brother in the patience that is in Christ in 1:9

He is the one who was on Patmos for the word of God in 1:9

2. **God, the Father.** Revelation 1:1. As in every other book in the Bible, the central character in the book of Revelation is God and in Revelation 1:1 we should take it as God the Father since we're told that he gave the revelation to Jesus Christ. At various points in the book God is revealed as the Sovereign over all (1:8). Comments later.

3. **The Holy Spirit.** Revelation 1:4,10 and 4:2 and 21:10. The entire Bible reminds us that when men wrote scripture they wrote as the Spirit moved them. We hear this in places like 1 Peter 1:11-12, 2 Peter 1:21 and 1 Corinthians 2:13. In Revelation we're told and then reminded repeatedly that John received his message and visions while "in the Spirit".

4. **Jesus Christ.** Revelation 1:1 and 5:5 and 22:16. The Father gives it to the Son who shows it to his servants who receive it "in the Spirit." In Revelation the triune God is always the

Revealer, but it is done through angels (1:2, and 22:6-9 would make this point). Whatever else this does it stresses the exalted nature of the triune God that can use exalted spirit beings to do its bidding.

Christ is described in numerous ways in the introduction (1:1-20).

He is the faithful witness in 1:5

He is the firstborn from the dead in 1:5

He is the ruler of the kings of the earth in 1:5

He is the one who loves us in 1:5

He loosed us from our sins in 1:5

He is the one who made us a kingdom and priests in 1:6

He is the coming one in 1:7

He is the high-priestly judge and Son of Man in 1:13-17

He is the Alpha and the Omega in 1:18

He is the Lord over death and hades in 1:19

He is Lord over the churches in 1:20

God's kingdom and Revelation 11.15-17

Whatever they make of the blowing of the seventh trumpet most commentators judge it to something that was future at the time John was writing the book of Revelation. I'm interested particularly in Revelation 11.15-17 which says this (NIV):

" 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.' "

All the other versions agree with the sense given by the NIV in 11:17 that the Lord God Almighty took his great power and began to reign. The ingressive first aorist is in the indicative (ebasileusas) and follows God's act of taking his power. Of that a perfect is used (eleiphes), which in association with the finality of the reign of Jesus probably speaks of permanence; that is, God at this point once and for all took his power and began to reign.

This raises a series of questions only two of which I'm interested in here:

1) What does it mean that God "took his great power"?

2) How does it come that he "began" to reign at this point?

Both phrases seem to suggest that God was without power or kingly sovereignty prior to the blowing of the 7th trumpet. That impression is only a surface one and it is incorrect. God has never been without power and his kingly rule is unbroken from eternity to eternity.

For our purposes here it doesn't matter to me whether one believes that the 7th trumpet is sounded at the end of human history or at 70AD or any other date after the appearance of Jesus Christ. My own view is that it speaks of God's judgment on the Roman Empire as it is represented by the emperor Domitian; but for now that is of no consequence. What are we to make of the claim that at the sound of the 7th trumpet God "took his great power" and "began to reign"?

Since the Bible everywhere insists that God reigns without limit over all that there is and has always so reigned and will always so reign, how are we to understand the two phrases?

We are to take it that these are specific manifestations of that already existing power and royal sovereignty. The power God always had simply by virtue of his being God was exercised in a specific way. Whatever we make of the event(s) in view in the 7th trumpet it was

not at that moment that God became Almighty or gained his almighty power. It was at that time that God expressed or showed or exhibited his almighty power.

Let's say we know beyond dispute what the 7th trumpet sounding meant. Let's call it X. The passage says that at X God took his great power and used it in a certain way to gain a certain object.

That act of God—his taking his almighty power—is further explained in the phrase "and began to reign." The idea that God had not already been reigning prior to X makes no biblical sense at all. It would certainly make sense if we were to say that God began to reign through a certain individual at X or that he began to exercise his dominion in a certain way, a way in which he hadn't been exercising it before or that he was publicly exhibiting his already existing reign. All those would make sense but to say that God was not reigning prior to X makes no sense! Bless me, nothing can exist or continue to exist if God doesn't enable it to exist (Revelation 4:10-11) so how can he be without power or royal sovereignty at any point?

So what is the passage not saying? The passage is not saying that God was without controlling power or kingly sovereignty prior to the sounding of the 7th trumpet. Yes, but the passage does say he began to reign at the sound of the 7th trumpet. This is true but we're faced with a choice between an actual beginning of the reign of God or a particular expression of the reign of God and there's no doubt in my mind which we are to go for.

11:15 tells us that at this point "the kingdom of the world" has become the kingdom of the Lord (and of his Christ). The empire that expressed the world spirit at this time was Rome (Revelation 17:9, 18) in keeping with Daniel 2 and 7. He who established these kingdoms on the earth (Babylon—Rome) promised that he would come in judgment on that four-fold structure and smite it in its Rome phase (be sure to see Daniel 2:31-45 and 7:1-27).

God's judgment on Rome was the public demonstration of God's sovereignty and not its beginning. It was God who raised up Rome (compare Daniel 4:17 with 2:37 and 7:2 with the wind as divine stirring) and when he judged her he was expressing the same sovereign power that he showed when he raised her up. So when we're told that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord we're not to be fooled into thinking that it wasn't already under God's sovereign power. He did then what psalmists of old asked him to do over and over again when they asked deliverance from their enemies. They asked God to show his sovereign power over the nations. That's what happens in Revelation 11:15-17 in light of 6:9-11 and see 18:20 when the city of Rome is seen to be destroyed.

And as surely as we are not to think that God's reign over Rome began with Revelation 11:15-17 we are not to think Jesus' reign began at 11:15-17. Jesus had already been made Lord of All (Acts 2:36, Ephesians 1:19-22; 1 Peter 3:21-22; Philippians 2:9-11, and everywhere else) prior to the writing of the book of Revelation. But who believed it at the beginning? Rome and the nation of Israel had conspired against the Lord and his Christ (see Psalm 2:1-9 and Acts 4:25-28) but failed to keep Jesus off the throne of the universe under God. For their pains and in demonstration of their failure God judged both Israel and Rome. See the above link.

The 7th trumpet in Revelation 11, as you will notice, contains the 7 bowls (as the 7th seal contained the 7 trumpets) and the seven bowls are the full outpouring of the plagues of God on the Roman Empire (the images are taken from the plagues poured out on Egypt at which time God was vindicating his "son"—Israel, and confirming his reign over Egypt and the world). Rome that claimed to be the divine city and persecuted the city of God (the people of God) claimed universal dominion and God in judging her made a public proclamation that he had universal dominion and that he had invested it his Son, Jesus the Christ. 11:15-17 teaches us that what was already true was publicly demonstrated when God exercised his almighty power and made his sovereignty visible.

Pathetic little churches--Mighty empires

Revelation 1:12-20 describes the glorified Christ from numerous angles but it makes full use of the prophets and Daniel 7:9 and the description of God. This divine and priestly figure is the conqueror of death and reigns over the kings of the earth but what is especially significant in light of the whole book of Revelation is that he dwells in the church and holds the heart of the church in his hand.

Maybe it's that that irritates and pleases us most about the sovereign Lord. He identifies not with the powerful empires, the successful governments, the solid economies or the military might of the Roman legions but with seven pathetic little churches. There are times when we know very well what Peter felt in John 13 and Matthew 16. Messiahs don't wash feet and Lords don't get crucified. Nowadays we are moved at the thought of him washing feet—"Ah, look, isn't he so sweet and humble." Nowadays we praise him for being crucified. "Look, see how he loves us." But we still have a hard time accepting that he identifies with pathetic little congregations, numerically weak and with no social or political clout whatever.

But in Revelation when he finally speaks (chapters 2 and 3) he zeros in on seven little congregations in Asia. He dismisses the huge throne of Zeus as satanic; he disowns the vast worship of the Roman Empire and sets himself against the powers that set themselves against the vulnerable assemblies. It doesn't seem to matter to him that the world can make no sense of how he goes about things. So there they are, for all their weaknesses and for all the wrongs they need to correct he still comes knocking on the heart's door of each of those congregations.

And what do they stand for? What on earth do they reflect? What do we see as we watch them going about their lives, with their ordinances, liturgy and shared central convictions? As crazy as it might appear both to non-believer and some depressed believers these little churches bear witness on earth to the reality that chapters 4 and 5 proclaim. For those two chapters are one word: "You believe in God, believe also in me." The invisible truth that the throne that rules the world is in heaven and not in Rome, London or Washington or any other center of earthly power is proclaimed in chapter 4. But what is perhaps more difficult to believe is that at the center of the throne that rules the world is a Lamb that has been slain and is alive and well (chapter 5). At the heart of the throne that rules creation in that invisible realm is the Lamb that is making himself visible in the seven churches of Asia.

Yes, but that's just the problem. Are we to keep on waiting before that Lord of life and death and the kings of the world—are we to wait forever before he makes a real difference in the world. Will he forever identify with the pathetic and the weak? Is evil always to be on top and goodness always barely hanging on? Hardly! But the question was raised in 6:10 and given a cryptic answer in 6:11.

The book as a whole proclaims the war between the mighty Roman Empire with its satanic power and agenda and the vulnerable little flock to whom it has pleased God to give the kingdom. As Revelation pictures it, Rome's clash with the church comes to its head in the battle of Armageddon (16 and 19) and when the smoke clears the seven little representative churches are a holy City with walls fifteen hundred miles high and wide. When the smoke has cleared the seven little representative churches are a bride dressed in her finery with her triumphant husband by her side. The little churches outlived and out-suffered and outlived again the mighty Empire.

Setting aside the imagery in which this truth is presented, the reality is that the might of the Emperors is long gone and the "seven" little churches are still going about their business, still called to go about their business of resisting the world in the name of the Lamb of God until 6:11 finds its complete fulfillment in the obliteration of all that is evil.

We're not to forget that modern empires are to get the message that what is true of Rome is true of them. 21st century Christians are not to forget that their mission and their assurance is proclaimed in the book of Revelation—no peace or compromise with the world empires is possible!

Revelation 20.5, First resurrection

A reader asked about Revelation 20:5 and the meaning of the “first resurrection”. Maybe the following brief remarks are useful. I think we should make up our minds to this first: John is revealing a truth by means of a picture. What he describes is what he sees but we’re supposed to say, “Yes, that’s what he sees but what is the truth he wants to convey by the images?”

In chapter 19 he has just described the battle of Armageddon (see it anticipated in chapter 16) where the Christ and his followers triumph over Satan, the beasts and the armies that followed them. Imagine a battlefield and imagine that when the smoke clears there are dead scattered all over the place. Imagine the Dragon/Serpent being imprisoned, the beast-leaders being thrown into a fire and now look at the scattered dead.

None of what you imagined is literally true as described. Whoever you make the Serpent and the beasts to be (I see them stand for Satan and the Roman Empire) the description in 19:19–20:3 is not to be taken literally. We’re supposed to say, “That’s what he saw, now what does he mean?”

The same is true regarding the dead and the resurrections. Imagine a battlefield littered with the dead. Now imagine many of them coming to life while a host of others remain dead. We’re told that those who come to life FIRST are those who had lived and died for the Lamb (20:4). This resurrection is just as surely a truth told in picture form as the binding and imprisoning of the Dragon. The now resurrected ones climb up on to thrones along with others who are already enthroned (20:4, beginning and end of verse). And what does the picture say? It says the followers of the Lamb are victors whether they die in battle or not. And who are they victorious over? In this case it is the Roman Empire, which is the instrument of Satan’s hatred against Christ and his church.

They are said to reign a thousand years (20:4 and compare 20:2-3). A thousand-year binding and reigning has nothing to do with chronology; it is a use of time to express a truth. It expresses the perfection of the defeat of Satan and the victory of the church. In his use of Rome the Satan is utterly defeated and not just slightly winded. In their conflict with Rome the followers of the Lamb don’t gain a slight advantage they triumph completely.

There are still corpses lying on the battlefield. They lie dead for the thousand years. Their utter loss is proclaimed by a thousand-year death just as a thousand-year living and reigning proclaims the triumph of the saints. When the thousand years have ended (that stays consistent with the vision’s use of time) the corpses left on the battlefield rise from the dead. But they rise to what? To die again (20:11-15). That is the “second” resurrection (though the term isn’t used in the text) in contrast to the first resurrection.

John said all the truth he was telling would soon be seen paraded before the eyes of the world and the city that claimed to be “the eternal city” (Rome) is ruined and its armies destroyed (compare 1:1 and 3 with 22:6,10).

So what do I think the first resurrection speaks of? It’s the triumph of the followers of the Lamb told in picture form and it contrasted with the utter defeat and loss of the followers of Satan.

Revelation and its way of speaking

Remarks on the nature of apocalyptic literature

It's important to remember that the Book of Revelation is prophetic even while it is apocalyptic (1:3 and 22:7-10) which means that one does not exclude the other. But the apocalyptic style of literature is distinctive. You know it when you read it. It has a lot in common with other forms of prophetic literature and parables and it depends on the reader knowing something about biblical history and what is going on in their world. In this way it is like other biblical writings. Just the same, while it does connect with other styles of writing, it is distinctive. You can go through the Bible and, most of the time, pick out the sections that are apocalyptic in nature.

Whatever else is true, apocalyptic literature isn't plain prose. Read Daniel chapter 3 and then read chapter 7. You don't have to be an Einstein to note the difference. In one case the writer tells us what literally happened and he tells it without the use of bizarre images. In the other the writer tells us of events or persons of the past, present and future and uses speech he doesn't want us to take literally. (Note the lion with eagle's wings and the leopard with four heads as illustrating the point.)

In apocalyptic literature God is always revealed as Sovereign and in control even in the face of entrenched evil and abusive governments. See Revelation 1:4 and 4:11 and 6:10 and see Daniel chapter 4.

In apocalyptic literature a writer may use extraordinary people from the past to describe the present or the future. (Examples would include Israel's wilderness experience and Elijah and Elisha as "the two witnesses".)

In apocalyptic literature a writer uses categories of uncreation and renewal (new creation) to make his points. Genesis 1 speaks of sun, moon and stars having their place in heaven and behaving in an orderly fashion but in apocalyptic literature heavens are rolled up, stars fall and immovable mountains tumble into the seas.

In apocalyptic literature writers reveal states of affairs or the inner character of something or they explain the working of ordinary events in terms of their spiritual meaning. And they normally do this by using imagery. (For example: the Roman Empire is pictured as the great Prostitute and the "earth beast" is a lamb with a dragon's voice.)

In apocalyptic literature a writer may use past events as models to describe coming judgment or blessing. (One illustration of this from among many would be the plagues of Egypt as they are used in Revelation.)

In apocalyptic literature human sin is linked with the original rebellion against God. As in Genesis we find God "uncreating" (see Noah's flood and the waters coming back up over the earth to create a deep as in Genesis 1:1) so in apocalyptic judgments local rebellions result in uncreation. Isaiah 34 and the judgment on Edom illustrates the point. So also Revelation 6 and the judgment there.

In apocalyptic literature sin is shown to have cosmic effects and not just personal. We tend to think that sin only affects us personally but in this kind of literature we're taught that it tears down the heavens and pollutes the entire world (compare Genesis 3:17-19 and Colossians 1:19-20). As described in images oceans are turned to dead man's blood, skies are rolled up and the planet is torn apart.

In apocalyptic literature numbers and colours are also used to convey truths. Some of the more obvious numbers are 7 and 12 and 1,000. Illustrations are everywhere. Comment later.

In apocalyptic literature everything has an angel. Winds, rivers, books and congregations have angels. In such cases the angels stand for "the inner nature or function" of the thing itself.

The angel is "the spirit of" the thing. For example, when Christ speaks to the "angel of the church" he is speaking to the church as it really is rather than how it looks externally.

11. The notion that apocalyptic language was chosen so that the enemies couldn't understand it doesn't make a lot of sense. Very often the writer explains what he has said under an image. Very often the writer explains the vision he has just given. Sometimes the writer himself doesn't understand the vision or the image. Besides, it wouldn't be difficult for an enemy to torture a believer and make him or her reveal the meaning.

Whatever else is true apocalyptic language sticks in the memory. Think of the images in the parables as examples.

Whatever else is true an image can make an abstract truth concrete. For example, to say a kingdom is savage and ruthless is one thing and to describe it in an image as a devouring beast makes the description come alive.

Whatever else is true the images correspond to the underlying truth. For example a "lamb" suggests one thing and a lamb that speaks like a dragon suggests something else (see Revelation 13:11).

12. The Book of Revelation is not only written in apocalyptic style, it is an apocalypse. That is, it is an "unveiling, a disclosing or a revealing." And we are supposed to take to heart what is written in it if we are to be blessed by God (1:3 and 22:7). The readers are called to "keep the words of the prophecy of this book." So the book is not a conundrum or a puzzle to be solved. It is truth that readers are to give their hearts to.

The Authors of the Book of Revelation

The apostle John. Revelation 1:4 and 11. John is the merely human by which the book of Revelation came to us. He received it when he was on the island of Patmos on the Lord's day (1:9). John describes himself in several ways in the introduction.

He is the bondservant of Jesus Christ in 1:1

He is a witness to what he saw and heard of God's word in 1:2

He is a brother in Christ in 1:9

He is a fellow-sufferer in 1:9

He is a brother in the kingdom of Christ in 1:9

He is a brother in the patience that is in Christ in 1:9

He is the one who was on Patmos for the word of God in 1:9

God, the Father. Revelation 1:1. As in every other book in the Bible, the central character in the book of Revelation is God and in Revelation 1:1 we should take it as God the Father since we're told that he gave the revelation to Jesus Christ. At various points in the book God is revealed as the Sovereign over all (1:8). Comments later.

The Holy Spirit. Revelation 1:4,10 and 4:2 and 21:10. The entire Bible reminds us that when men wrote scripture they wrote as the Spirit moved them. We hear this in places like 1 Peter 1:11-12, 2 Peter 1:21 and 1 Corinthians 2:13. In Revelation we're told and then reminded repeatedly that John received his message and visions while "in the Spirit".

Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:1 and 5:5 and 22:16. The Father gives it to the Son who shows it to his servants who receive it "in the Spirit." In Revelation the triune God is always the Revealer, but it is done through angels (1:2, and 22:6-9 would make this point). Whatever else this does it stresses the exalted nature of the triune God that can use exalted spirit beings to do its bidding.

Christ is described in numerous ways in the introduction (1:1-20).

He is the faithful witness in 1:5

He is the firstborn from the dead in 1:5

He is the ruler of the kings of the earth in 1:5
He is the one who loves us in 1:5
He loosed us from our sins in 1:5
He is the one who made us a kingdom and priests in 1:6
He is the coming one in 1:7
He is the high-priestly judge and Son of Man in 1:13-17
He is the Alpha and the Omega in 1:18
He is the Lord over death and hades in 1:19
He is Lord over the churches in 1:20

Revelation: The storyline

This is a brief overview of how the book of Revelation hangs together. There are some additional remarks in other lessons on this site that offer some support for some of the presumptions that are made in what follows.

Revelation speaks eternal truths in a temporal setting. It is a letter written to seven churches that existed during the Roman Empire. These seven specific congregations represent what was and is true about all the churches that go to make up the body of Christ. They live in a world of corruption and oppression and they themselves are infected to more or less degree by the world in which they live.

But they have this, that they belong to God and have been called to live to the glory of God and rehearse the truth about the God who has revealed himself to the world in and as Jesus Christ, the Lord of a new creation and Lord of all.

In this book, the Christ who abides in the church (chapter 1) is seen in conflict with the Dragon who abides in the Roman Empire (chapter 13 and elsewhere). The specific historical events in which that conflict is focused are to come to pass shortly because the time for them is near (1:1,3 and 22:6,10, compared with Daniel 8:26). John chooses out (or rather, is given) a specific slice of history and that slice is invested with meaning and significance. What is that meaning and significance? John is told something like: "See in it and tell to the church, 'Your enemy is ruthless and powerful and satanic but I am all-powerful and your enemy rises only to go to his doom'."

Other events were going on in other distant parts of the world; events just as tumultuous in their social and political consequences as those going on in the Roman Empire. But it is the slice of history that John and his contemporaries are acquainted with that God chooses to declare eternal and assuring truth. God reigns!

The eternal and assuring truth is not told in prose (as it is, say, in Mark or 1 Samuel or Kings) but in images, pictures. Many of the images are borrowed from the OT and, among other things, they serve to give visible and earthly events a spiritual and cosmic dimension.

In chapter 1 the living Christ reveals himself to John as the faithful witness and ruler of the kings of the earth and as the redeemer and the one that lives in the church. He commissions John to record everything he has seen—even the initial vision and the commission to write.

He then turns to the seven churches in chapter 2—4 and addresses their needs (commendation and encouragement, rebuke and consolation, warning and assurance). He prepares them for the coming conflict. Throughout the book there is constant comfort and assurance offered precisely because the enemy is so powerful and cruel and frightening.

Chapters 4 and 5 lay down the truth that sets the tone for the whole book. This truth is meant to shape the response of the church in the totality of its life. It will remind the church

who alone is worthy of worship and who governs all the powers that exist in the world. Chapter 4 shows that the throne that rules the world is not in Rome, Italy but in heaven and chapter 5 shows that at the centre of that throne is a Lamb that has been slain (by Rome, no less) but lives again.

There is a little book in chapter 5 (the immediate destiny of the saints) that is completely sealed (with seven seals) and which can be opened only by Jesus Christ for he alone is worthy. Seals conceal and protect from tampering. In chapter 6 six of the seals are torn off, revealing the conquering Christ, God's four sore judgments (war, famine, pestilence and wild animals—desolation), the appeal of the slaughtered righteous and the judgment coming against the oppressive world.

Chapter 7 gives the assurance that in this judgment the people of God (pictured as 144,000 Jews) are exempted from the judgment. (Not exempted from suffering but from judgment). These are sealed against the judgment. But does the sealing work? The last half of the chapter says it does and we see the 144,000 under a different image coming through the tribulation. They are now described in terms of a Jewish Tabernacle Feast celebration. The Feast of Tabernacles was the most joyous of all Jewish feasts. It was a celebration of God protecting and sustaining Israel through their awful wilderness journeys and it was a promise of future providence.

With the tearing off of the seventh seal we're introduced to the seven trumpets in chapter 8 and 9. In the OT, trumpets called the nation to attention and were sounded as warnings. This was common throughout the ancient world. The trumpets are warning judgments and not the full outpouring of God's wrath on the impenitent and oppressive world. As imaged the warning judgments are modeled on the OT plagues on Egypt. Certain portions of the earth, waters and heavens are affected but we're told that the worshipers of evil are impenitent and don't give God glory.

Chapters 10-12 are more comfort since we're told that the enemy still resists God's judgments. John's commission is renewed and the church is picture in chapter 11 under the image of two witnesses. The OT has numerous illustrations of two witnesses (Moses & Aaron, Elijah & Elisha, Zerubbabel & Joshua) and the church in 11 do the wonders that they can do while holding forth the word of God as they did. They picture of these witnesses reminds us that even during troubled times they are unstoppable and that even when it appears they are defeated they really are not. In chapter 12 the people of God are seen under two images: a glorious Woman (the corporate whole) and her children (the individual members). She is driven into the wilderness and there protected (as Israel and Elijah were).

These chapters of assurance and call to faithful commitment are needed because the enemy is indeed power-filled, savage and satanic. Chapter 13 introduces us to two bestial images of the Roman Empire. The first is Rome as a military power (the sea beast) and instead of honoring God they choose to submit to and extend the authority of the Dragon, the Serpent and the Devil. The second (earth) beast is Rome as a perverted religious power that serves to bind all the nations to Rome in a way that goes beyond what mere force can accomplish. The religious structures of Rome are another way of expressing her power and that power is satanic. A third image of Rome is presented in chapters 17 and 18 where Rome is both a woman and a city. There it is Rome as the world's leading commercial power that is supported by the military might of the sea beast.

Chapters 4—12 and 14—19 have huge chunks of praise to God and these sections sandwich chapter 13 where the world worships the Roman beast. This is a central truth hammered home again and again: worship God and God alone.

In light of the frightening images that reflect the beasts and the world that worships the beast, chapters 14—15 speak comfort and courage again. And in a series of announcements

(like newspaper headlines) they proclaim assurance to the people of God that Rome and all its allies are to be destroyed. These chapters preview what will happen in later chapters (like the battle of Armageddon, the destruction of the great city and the like).

As the seventh seal contained the seven trumpets so the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls of wrath. Taken in their entirety the seven bowls complete the outpouring of God's wrath on the satanic kingdom and all that support it. The description of the battle of Armageddon (remember 1:1,3 and 22:6,10) is between those that come from the sunrise and cross water on dry ground and the two beast and the armies that support them. This is another way to describe the people of God against Rome. No one in scripture crosses water on dry ground but the people of God (see other lessons on this). The outpouring of the seven bowls are briefly described and remind us of the plagues against Egypt when they were the power that oppressed God's people and opposed God's purposes in the world. Aspects of what the seven bowls cover are developed in chapters 18—20. (See the notes of the identity of the woman and the heads and kings in chapter 17.)

Chapter 17—18 speak of Rome as a great Prostitute that all the kings and merchants of the world commit fornication with. She is the city on seven hills that rules the world in John's day and she is supported by her military might. Her commercial nature is demonstrated in the almost tedious description of her as the world's warehouse. Like so many other nations she destroys herself by inner division and she goes down in flames (chapter 18). This is Rome destruction as viewed by one set of images.

Just prior to the description of the battle of Armageddon the Lamb and his people have a celebration under the image of marriage feast. In a marriage feast both parties fully identify with one another and rejoice in one another. All this is in chapter 19 where the battle is then fought between the satanic empowered beasts and their allies and the Christ and his white-horsed followers. In chapter 16 where the battle was previewed it was between the beasts and their armies and those from the sunrise that crossed water on dry ground. Here it is between the beasts and their armies and Christ and his people.

The battle ends with the utter destruction of the two beasts, the death of their allies and the imprisonment of the dragon.

Chapter 20 describes the defeat of the Dragon. It is described as a 1,000-year imprisonment. This 1,000-year relates only to his use of Rome and it describes his defeat in that venture as utter and complete.

John now sees a great battlefield with a host of dead people scattered over it. In the war against the beasts many had been faithful to Christ until death. John sees many of the dead on the battlefield come to life and take their places with others and reign with Christ. Not all on the battlefield come to life—only those who have died for Christ. The rest of the dead had been allies of Rome and they remain dead. John sees what he calls a "first" resurrection and that's a resurrection to life. He speaks of another resurrection that is not unto life but unto a second death.

The whole 1,000-year series of images refer to Rome and its allies and the Dragon that inspired the anti-God venture. The Dragon is bound a thousand years, the allies of the beasts lie dead for a thousand years and the righteous reign in triumph for a thousand years. Those all relate to the conflict with Rome and describe it from different angles. (Do those who die for Christ in the conflict lose? No! How are we told that? In an image, they resurrect and reign in triumph with Christ.)

Now assured that Rome loses, the question arises: "Can we always be assured of triumph?" That is answered (as it is in Ezekiel 38—39) with another image. Satan is given another chance, raises an army from the four corners of the earth, comes against God's people

and is utterly destroyed. The immediate future is secure (Rome is going down) and the entire future is secure (any enemy, however huge, will go down).

Now that we know that Rome and the world she shaped has been overcome, in chapters 21—22 we have a picture of a new world, a new heaven and earth. The people of God are described as a glorious and indestructible city (not a wreck) and a bride glorious dressed (not in tattered clothing). The Roman world of oppression and evil has been destroyed and a new world where God's righteousness has been vindicated fills out the entire drama.

Triumph and Loss in Revelation

The future victory of the redeemed is described in numerous images. Marriage suppers, a City 1,5000 miles high, wide and broad, made of jewels and precious things. There is an Edenic garden with lines of Trees of Life with leaves that heal the diseases of the nations, enthronement for 1,000 years and access to a River of Life (and numerous other images in the book).

The fate of the defeated armies of the Dragon and his Beasts is to be trampled in a winepress until the blood is a river six feet deep and one hundred and eighty miles long (14:17-20). Their fate is death, resurrection to a second death, ceaseless burning in a lake of fire (which in 14:9-11 is located in the presence of the Lamb) and various other things.

To take either of these two composite pictures as the actual description of what is yet ahead and build a doctrine on it that people must receive or be called heretics makes no sense to me. I don't think the Revelation passages that speak of a lake of fire should be used to support the doctrine of eternal conscious torture of the unforgiven. I think that the battle in Revelation is Christ and the Church against the Dragon and Rome. The extended picture of Rome's defeat, which includes warning plagues, followed by a full outpouring of wrath, wasn't meant to be understood in any literal fashion. I don't think we're supposed to take the judgment scenes literally either. These are all images of how an anti-God, anti-holiness, anti-life tyrannical kingdom was to go down before a God of holiness, life and power. It spoke to the church in the first century and speaks to every generation that follows.

To build a picture of heavenly bliss or hellish torture in the future on the precise details gives in these images is to miss the mark completely.